

CORVINUS UNIVERSITY OF BUDAPEST

USER PARTICIPATION AS A MARKETING  
COMMUNICATIONS TOOL IN THE AGE OF  
DIGITAL MEDIA

*Ph.D. thesis*

Supervisor: Dr. Dóra Horváth, Ph.D.

Tamás Viktor Csordás

Budapest, 2015



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Institute of Marketing and Media  
Department of Media, Marketing Communications and  
Telecommunication

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The topic of the present dissertation is the phenomenon of consumer participation in the value creation process for organizations, and in particular, the marketing communications effects thereof. As a researcher, professor and not least as a member of probably the first wave of "digital natives", the author of the present dissertation observes with great interest the digital space that in merely 15 years has become a significant social, cultural phenomenon, and, moreover, a growingly dominant toolbox for marketers.

A long reasoning about the significance and proliferation of digital and social media in 2015 would be much of a cliché. While most researchers acknowledge the presence thereof in people's everyday lives, views remain varied about their social significance and marketing effects. The sustained research interest in the topic for the past 15 years shows that not only digital media is a novel area that needs to be studied, but that the study of digital media as a complex phenomenon has now secured a high social relevance and a broadened and deepening knowledge of the medium is now required, backed up by the recognition that entirely new working mechanisms seem to more and more take shape.

At the same time, while this new digital environment has many innovations in store for consumers as well as organizations, the underlying driving forces can by no means be referred to as new. What makes it especially important to releasing a similar summary work is the extend these underlying phenomena take in this new environment: while in the past participating consumers might have only been referred to as a small, bold, and eccentric segment of society, the phenomenon of consumer participation has more and more entered (not independently of the empowerment offered by digital technology) the mainstream of social processes and the focus of attention. Yet, one can conclude, that there is hardly enough scientific knowledge about the phenomenon.

## 1.1. Aims and significance of the research

As most organizations have no other choice but to enter the field of social media marketing and communications, this can no longer be considered an innovation in marketing communications, which brings about the phenomenon of advertising clutter (Ha – McCann, 2008) to the ecosystem, where it is essential for the organization to manage to be an effective participant of the environment.

The main focus of the dissertation is thus to explore the opportunities for firms' marketing communications lying in user-generated media and the diffusion thereof.

The dissertation studies a paradigm shift in marketing communications in the process. This process can be referred to as **consumer empowerment**, a passive, social, economic, and technological phenomenon that organizations can forestall and capitalize on by actively empowering their consumers. The dissertation's **scientific goal** is to contribute to the literature on consumer empowerment and online information diffusion by offering marketing-focused insights to them. Another scientific goal is to examine the concept of consumer value creation as a focal point in the framework of an empirical study thus offering a contribution to the framing of the concept and to the understanding of the underlying working mechanisms, while providing a starting point for further research on the marketing communication impact of consumer value.

An important practical significance of the study is to highlight the fact that new media is a complex environment and its use in marketing communications cannot be a goal in itself (contrarily to the still too many apparent examples in practice today), rather a strategic tool which needs to be an integral part of (and therefore fit into) the organization's wider marketing and management strategy (see e.g. Csordás et al., 2014). The dissertation introduces the fields of user-generated content into this strategic approach in order for potential advertisers to be able to effectively plan and execute marketing communications tasks relevant to this new environment (Ahrens – Coyle, 2011: 13). By this goal, we aim to draw the attention to the marketing significance of user-generated contents (Krishnamurthy – Dou, 2008). At the same time, the dissertation is a cautionary tale about the dangers related to the using of active user participation for business means.



## 1.2. Paradigm shift in marketing and the effects thereof on marketing communications

There is growing evidence that marketing science as well as practice are undergoing a paradigm shift. For nearly 20 years, between 1985 and 2004 the American Marketing Association's official definition of marketing had remained unchanged, despite the three-year review cycles while, since then, it has already been significantly altered twice (Gundlach – Wilkie, 2009). While in the years 1980's and 90's a strategy-focused view of marketing was dominant, since the middle of the 2000-2010 decade there has been more and more indications that an externally-focused (e.g. stakeholder-, relationship-, communication-focused) marketing logic is about to take the dominant place (see e.g. Merz et al., 2009; Vargo – Lusch, 2004), and views like postmodern marketing have been slowly entering mainstream scientific discourse (Mitev – Horváth, 2008). Hence, according to the current official definition of the AMA, marketing

"is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large" (AMA, 2007/2013).

The notion of **value** entered the definition of marketing in 2004, while the current definition adopted in (and kept since) 2007 introduces, even beyond the organizations and its **stakeholders**, society at large as beneficiary of the marketing activity. Another novelty is that value creation is no longer considered a direct task of an organization's marketing activity (as this was the case, for instance, in the 2004 definition<sup>1</sup>). Instead, value creation is carried out indirectly through promises and offerings by the organization as a whole and achieved through **interactions** between the organization and its other stakeholders. Overall this brings about a conceptual extension of marketing and takes into account the complex environment in which companies exist in the new millennium.

The complex environment can be best characterized by a growing number of the aforementioned stakeholders as well as of their market connections, an exponential

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<sup>1</sup> According to the 2004 definition, marketing "is an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders" (AMA, 2004 in Gundlach – Wilkie, 2009: 259).

growth of available marketing data (referred to as “big data”) and a growing variety of communication channels (Forsyth, 2004).

The growing influence of company-stakeholder interactions as well as the sharp increase of the number of stakeholders foreshadows an appreciation of the organizational role of communications.

“Brands do not exist in a void. Regardless whether or not a company participates online, consumers are constantly talking online about companies and services” (Johnston, 2011: 84). The communications environment can thus be defined as a many-to-many, “aggressively interactive” (Rust et al., 2010: 96) environment, where all participants can take the role of information source, and where an organization (even for the message of their own brand, product or service) is hardly one of many information emitters. Hence the perception of postmodern marketing, according to which **marketing communications can and should not be about only disseminating pieces of information, but it should rather focus on communications as a partnership, where meaning and value creation are performed with the active participation of consumers and other stakeholders present in the communication environment** (Mitev – Horváth, 2008).

### 1.3. Value creation in marketing communications

Marketing communications, by using user- and consumer-generated content in this perspective become a tool for differentiation through a marketing-based value proposition that goes beyond the core product benefits.

However, in the postmodern space, the notions of production and consumption intertwine: consumers themselves participate in the marketing activity, marketing becomes a value carrier as much as production itself, and production becomes a consumer of consumers’ expected value (Firat – Venkatesh, 1995). Ebben In this context production is no longer a linear and delimited process nor can consumers be considered end-users at the end of the value chain (Szabó, 2001). Similarly, the concepts of product and service

are blurred. On a market of consumer goods filled with products with practically matching attributes (Shugan, 2004) a manufacturer ought to prevail through the de-commoditization (Sassatelli, 2007) of its products and thereby constitute added value to consumers (and, in addition, apply a price premium) (Mahajan – Wind, 2002). At the same time services are built upon the co-creation of value between the organization and the consumer (Akaka et al., 2014).

According to this perception, consumer relations and highly personalized communications to narrow and well-defined target groups appear as a core element of a company's marketing activity. While traditional "push" marketing is product- and brand-focused, consumer-orientation brings about a highly personalized communication thanks to its narrow and well-defined target groups (Rust et al., 2010). Following this logic, the product itself can still remain generic although marketing communications are to establish and maintain unique, personal value perceptions and meanings related to the extended product.

#### **1.4. Structure and schedule of the dissertation**

The present doctoral dissertation is in line with the scientific work accomplished in the past years by the collective of the Department of Media, Marketing Communications and Telecommunication at Corvinus University of Budapest. The basics of the doctoral research were laid down in 2009 with the first related empirical research projects having been conducted in the fall of the same year. The structure of the literature review was finalized by the end of 2012, by handing in the draft thesis work. The literature review of the dissertation has been used as a basis for various literature review articles as well as textbook chapters. The fact that since the defense of the draft thesis work in November 2013 many studies were published in the same or related topics shows the topicality of the dissertation's subject. A selection of these new results were integrated within the given framework of the dissertation.

The final structure of the dissertation, as well as its final empirical research topic and overall purpose was determined by the author joining the Cre8tv.eu research project

supported by a grant of the 7th Framework Programme (FP7) of the European Commission. Within this project, the Corvinus research collective was tasked with establishing a deeper understanding of consumer-generated contents, and thereby with exploring the related competitive factors for the creative industries, and the marketing communications industry within. The foundations of the dissertation's empirical research were laid during 2014, and the research itself was carried out in the beginning of 2015.

In the literature review, we start our argumentation by determining the relevant factors of customer value based on the official definition of marketing. Following that we proceed to the taxonomic classification of consumer participation, and to the narrowing of the topic to the elements relevant to the marketing communication function. All this in the view of operationalizing the topic in connection with consumer value and meaning creation. In a last stance we examine the factors of diffusion of content as the basic element of digital communication. Based on the literature review we formulate the research questions related to the dissertation's subject and give an outline of the research methodology followed during the empirical research phase. Following that we briefly present the results of three preliminary studies related to the dissertation's topic. In a last chapter, we give an overview on the dissertation's main empirical research.

## **PART I. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2. CONSUMER VALUE IN MARKETING**

The current definition of marketing as seen in the introduction of the dissertation confirms the statement that marketing value is generated through interactions between the organization and its other stakeholders. Understanding the consumer side of value creation can help to contribute to elaborating services- and value-focused business strategies (Woodruff, 1997), to increasing perceived consumer value and thereby to consumer loyalty.

The concept of value in the business literature can be traced back to three main approaches (Khalifa, 2004): (1) shareholder value (see e.g. Black et al., 1998), (2) stakeholder value (see e.g. Kitchen – Schultz, 2001; Peyrefitte, 2012), and (3) consumer value.

The importance of the relationship of the organization with not only its shareholders and customers but also with its employees and society as a whole is already shown in the official definition of marketing from 2007. One possible reason behind this extension can be that organizations do not exist in a void, and its immediate and wider environment both largely affect its activities and overall effectiveness (see e.g. Heskett et al., 1994). Shareholder value is the result of the organization's long-term business performance (Kaplan – Norton, 1996 in Khalifa, 2004). However business performance in turn is largely at the mercy of the organization's relationship with its consumers (Grönroos, 2000), and the resulting consumer loyalty (see e.g. Reichheld et al., 2000). This way marketing research tends to put into forward the third category, that of consumer value. The present dissertation equally deals more in detail with the category of consumer value and the consumer manifestations thereof, referring however to the role of the various interest groups in the value creation process. Moreover we consider business value the indirect effect of organizational performance (value creation).

Defining consumer value in marketing is difficult for it is a complex, multidimensional and, to a large extent, subjective concept (Payne – Holt, 2001; Rekettye, 1997) used by researchers in various contexts and research fields (Berács, 2003). These sources however offer a number of key features that can help in delimiting it. A first common characteristic is the **dynamic** and temporal nature of consumer value (Jaworski – Kohli, 1993; Khalifa, 2004). Sources on consumer value also largely agree on the fact that value stems from consumers' **perception** and **experience** (Helm – Jones, 2010; Merz et al., 2009) and is not the mere result of a company's intended effort. Thus “the value of a product is not what the producer puts in, but what the consumer gets out” (Doyle, 1989: 78). Consumers' perception of value is therefore equally influenced by the consumption and market environment (e.g. number of substitutes, marketing communications).

Khalifa (2004) identifies three groups of value models in the literature: (1) value components models, (2) benefits/costs ratio models and (3) means-ends models. He argues that value as a marketing concept can be identified through the combined consideration of these three views. In the following we present a brief overview of the three models.

## 2.1. Value components models and the dynamic model of consumer value

Value components models distinguish between various building blocks and functions of consumer value.

Kaufman (1998) defines three value components: (1) exchange value or “worth”, (2) utility value or “need”, (3) esteem value or “want”.

Based on previous reviews on the concept of value (e.g. Khalifa, 2004; Rowley, 2008) one can state that the literature often confuses the narrower or broader concepts of consumer value. Based on Kaufman's (1998) categories, exchange value (“worth”), a microeconomic concept, can be considered the narrowest interpretation of the concept.

Similarly, Green and Jenkins (2011: 119) define "value" (interestingly, in opposition to "worth") as no other than measurable and quantifiable exchange value, based on "agreed upon standards and measurements". In other words, exchange value can be considered a measurement of the preference of a consumer toward one or another product or service of similar attributes in an offer and demand context, and can give indications as to the social and other context of the intended use of the given product or service by the user (Kaufman, 1998).

In contrast, a consumer "**need**" is intended to describe physical characteristics of a product or service (Kaufman, 1998) and thereby a consumer performance triggered by that product or service.

Lastly, the **esteem value** of a product or service is the sum of those attributes that lead consumer to buy them for the mere desire of ownership (Kaufman, 1998) and to which it is impossible to put a price on (Hyde, 1983 in Green – Jenkins, 2011). Esteem value is therefore largely personal and thus variable. This way, unveiling and understanding consumer meanings becomes particularly important in assessing esteem value as this category can be described as the colloquial concept of "added value". In this perspective, the added value of a product or service is an "emotional investment" (Green – Jenkins, 2011: 119) in the consumption of culturally embedded products.

Kano's **model of customer perception** (Kano et al., 1984 in Khalifa, 2004: 648), building upon the disconfirmation model (Oliver – Bearden, 1985) distinguishes between various functional components of the concept of value. The model examines two dimensions: the presence of characteristics and the level of customer satisfaction. Along these two dimensions, three major product attributes can be distinguished (Khalifa, 2004): (1) dissatisfiers, (2) satisfiers and (3) delighters.

- **Dissatisfiers** are implicitly expected, elementary product requirements that every product within a category should satisfy to even be marketable: their existence does not lead to any additional satisfaction, but their absence leads to customer dissatisfaction.

- **Satisfiers** are comparable to performance indicators. They are expected and expressed consumer needs. These are one-dimensional product attributes, most often associated with the product's or service's performance.
- **Delighters** are unexpected, often innovative features which, when met, trigger surprise and additional satisfaction from the consumer.

As can be seen from the description of delighters, one can observe that value components models merely represent a static state and therefore are less applicable to the entire product and consumer life cycles: they do not take into consideration the temporality and dynamics of these latter (e.g. during the life cycle of a product a delighter can first become a satisfier then even a dissatisfier on the market). By introducing the organization's whole value proposition and the evolving consumer expectations (time dimension) into the model, one can state that satisfiers reflect the relative performance of the product in relation to the product category. In case of a product innovation, an potentially innovative product attribute does not belong to the expected product requirements (i.e. is not a dissatisfier) and can therefore considered as a value added function (delighter). In time however, that very function can move from being a delighter to a satisfier, and later to being a dissatisfier (this is the process of innovation diffusion and acceptance (for more in detail see Nyirő, 2011)).

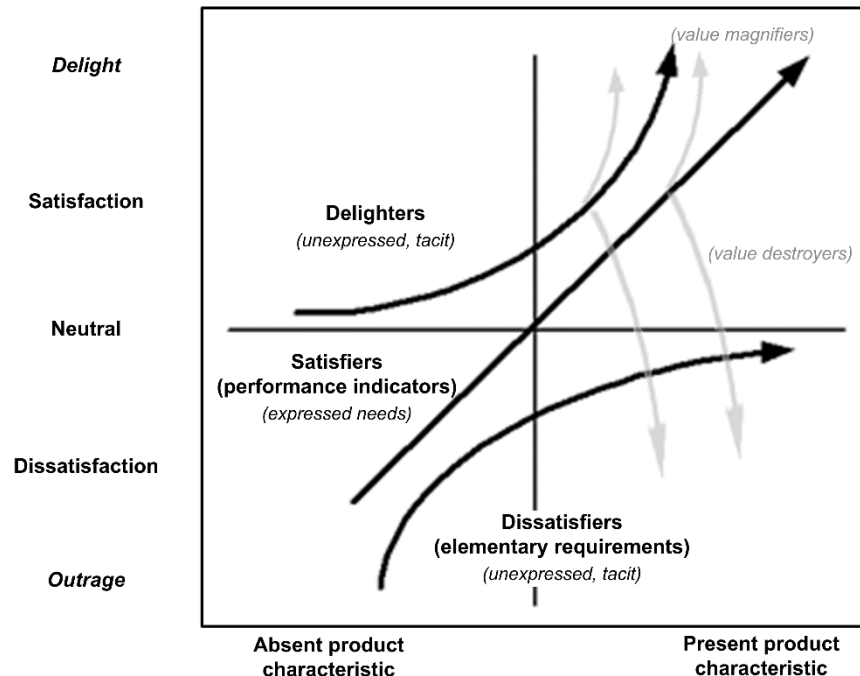
By accepting the personal and subjective nature of value, the organization is bound to deal with the emotional charge of consumer value as well. As Schneider and Bowen (1999) argue, most consumers range from moderately satisfied to moderately dissatisfied. This implies that consumer loyalty is a rather ambivalent construct (Khalifa, 2004) and various momentary value magnifiers (e.g. sales promotion tools) or destroyers (e.g. poor customer service) can easily dissuade consumers from their original purchase intentions.

At the same time the presence of delighters and in some cases the absence of dissatisfiers can predict even more intense consumer reactions. While moderate (dis)satisfaction is mainly due to product performance (i.e. satisfiers), in these extreme cases above average emotional charges like delight or “awesomeness” (Haque, 2009), or outrage (Schneider – Bowen, 1999) will prevail. These in turn would then explain consumer behaviors like brand evangelism (Scarpi, 2010) or antibranding (Krishnamurthy – Kucuk, 2009).



Figure 1 shows a graphic representation of the Kano model and its dynamic variant.

**Figure 1. Extension of Kano's model of customer perception: The dynamic model of customer value**



Source: based on Khalifa (2004: 648,658)

## 2.2. Utilitarian models

Benefits/costs ratio or utilitarian models trace back perceived customer value to the difference between customers' perceived benefits and customers' perceived costs (Day, 1990; Horowitz, 2000) where value of a product or service is what a consumer is willing to pay for it (Porter, 1998). As seen in the value components model, perceived consumer advantages can be tangible (e.g. meeting consumer needs) or intangible (e.g. added emotional value). However it can be noted that with their purchase decision of a product or service customers not only make a pecuniary effort (i.e. **price** paid) but also a sacrifice (i.e. **opportunity cost**) by diverting resources from other possible uses and investing time and effort into purchasing and consuming the given good or service (Kotler – Keller, 2012). Huber et al. (2001) identify the following cost factors: time costs, search costs,

learning costs, emotional costs, cognitive and physical effort, as well as financial, social and psychological risks.

The higher the exchange value or the associated costs of a product or service, the lower its perceived benefit will be for the customer (Khalifa, 2004). The company can improve, extend or expand the perceived benefit (Horowitz, 2000) by improving the performance of certain **product attributes** (e.g. by pointing out a product's unique selling propositions [USP] during marketing communications), extending the product to an integral **solution** (Helm – Jones, 2010; Vargo – Lusch, 2004) (e.g. by offering software as a service [SaaS] instead of software alone) and by expanding the act of consumption to an **experience**.

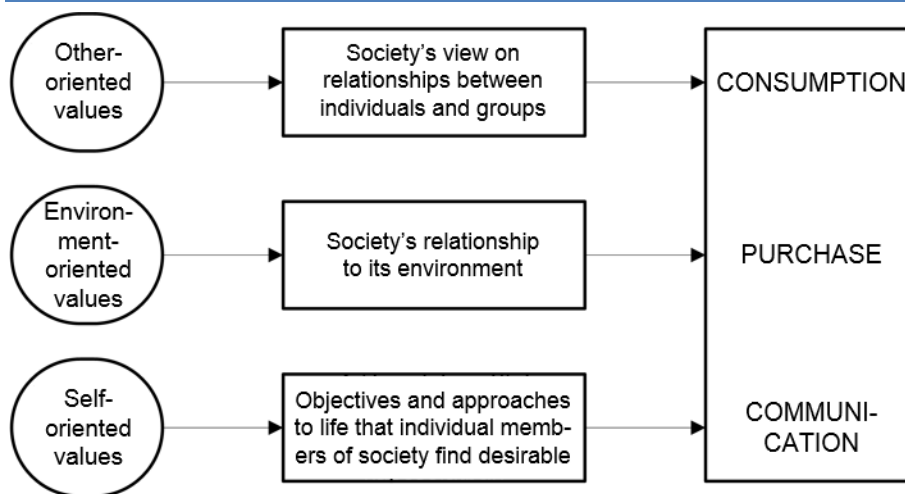
In this sense, products consist of a **core value** and additional, **added value** elements (Grönroos, 2000). These latter however can also be negative: the incorrect handling by the company of its support activities (e.g. poor distribution system) can negatively impact on the perceived value by the customer. Thus, in case a company does not consider these complementary services as part of the product, service offering or bundle (i.e. following a consumer- and service-oriented logic (see Vargo – Lusch, 2004)) rather as a necessary evil (i.e. part of additional administrative routines based on a mere internal transaction system), these complementary services might even be counterproductive effect on the consumer perception of the service as a whole (Grönroos, 2000; Khalifa, 2004).

### 2.3. Means-ends models

Means-ends models are based on the premise that products and services are purchased with the ultimate intention to satisfy a given need or goal. These models are prevalent in consumer behavior literature where they serve as the basis for the concept of value (Hofmeister-Tóth, 2003).

Value surveys developed by social psychologists (e.g. Rokeach 1973) explore consumers' cultural, social and personal beliefs and convictions. These psychological and symbolic values can be related to consumer culture through the acts of consumption, purchase or communication (Hawkins et al., 1992 in Hofmeister-Tóth, 2003) (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. The relationship between values and consumer behavior**



**Source: Hawkins et al. (1992: 37 in Hofmeister-Tóth, 2003: 37)**

The means-end value system developed by Milton J. Rokeach (1968, 1973 in Hofmeister-Tóth, 2003) is one of the most prominent examples of the related social psychological works. Within end (or terminal) values, one can distinguish between individual and social values. The importance of these varies according to the place of individual and social values within individuals' value systems. Within means (or instrumental) values, one can distinguish between moral and competence values. Moral values are socially related and

contribute to determining expected patterns of behavior. On the other hand, competence values are related to the level of individual behavior (Hofmeister-Tóth, 2003).

In a social psychological approach consumers might manifest in direct or indirect relation to their acts of consumption needs other than a product's or service's functional attributes and conversely, one can consider **consumption as a socially embedded phenomenon** where consumption itself contributes to the expression of consumers' value systems (Rekettye, 1997). Schneider and Bowen (1999) consider security, justice and self-esteem as the three basic customer needs. Park et al. (1986) classify consumer needs into three categories: functional needs, experiential needs, and symbolic needs. Similarly, Smith and Wheeler (2002) distinguish between three categories of consumer's brand choice motivations: (1) functional needs, (2) self-image, and (3) the customer identification with the attitude that the brand represents. In this regard, individuals are first and foremost human beings with psychological and social needs and then only consumers (Fournier – Lee, 2009). As consumers, their needs can be further divided into elemental expectations related to solving an initial problem and functional expectations related to the attributes of the product/service they are about to consume. Moreover, it is actual (positive or negative) experience that leads to the extreme emotional states of delight or outrage (Figure 1), rather than objective satisfiers.

In a means-end logic, consumption brings about desirable or undesirable **outcomes** which manifest themselves either directly, at the moment of consumption or indirectly, over time, through other consumers' behaviors. In this respect consumption is far from being an end in itself, the company-consumer relationship can be considered a consumer-initiated response to a given consumer need. The notion of value is well beyond the scope of the company and that of the perceived and actual product attributes.

Gallié (2009) identifies two main components of value: utility value and existential value. **Utility value** assesses the extent to which customers' functional expectations are met (this category best corresponds to the value components of dissatisfiers and satisfiers). **Existential** or **symbolic values** (Khalifa, 2004) represent a category of values that includes all consumer perceptions beyond the mere functional attributes of a product. This is the category through which marketing communications efforts can have an impact on consumers. Symbolic values can be further divided into social, hedonic and ethical value

components (Gallié, 2009), to personal (affective/emotional) and external (social value (Ivanauskienė et al., 2012) or linking value (Cova – Cova, 2002)) components. Symbolic values contribute to consumers' self-expression and social success and thereby determine the consumer experience derived from the consumption of a given product or service. Consumer **experience** thus can be considered as the basis of a product or service's **value proposition** (Levitt, 1981).

It is important to note that the perception of a product or service is **relative**: consumers decide whether a product is better, similar or worse in relation to the available alternatives on the market. This perceived difference of value, being the effect of an active, cognitive effort from the consumer, is in itself a value carrier.

In a summarizing definition, Woodruff (1997: 142) refers to **customer value** as

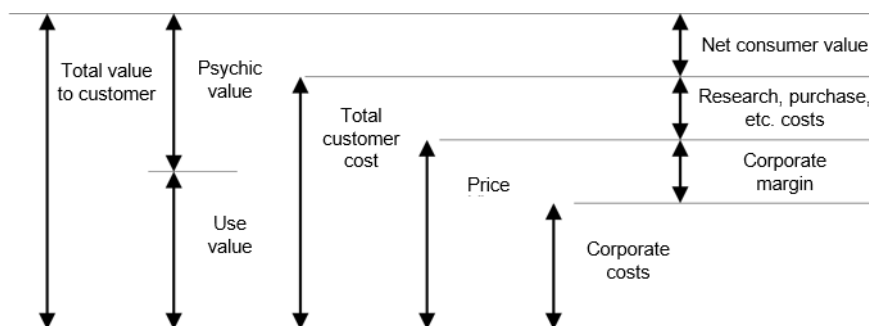
"a customer's perceived preference for and evaluation of those product attributes, attribute performances, and consequences arising from use that facilitate (or block) achieving the customer's goals and purposes in use situations."

According to this definition, value stems from a subjective consumer perception, consequence of the consumption of a product or service. It is positive when the product or service goes beyond its simple functional properties and is instrumental in solving the original problem or need it was consumed for in the first place, and negative if it fails to achieve this. Value is a dynamic process: each use of or encounter with the product shapes its evaluation thereof by the consumer. By including a context (i.e. goals and purposes) to the act of consumption the definition resolves why perceived value is relative and why certain product attributes are more important to a given circle of consumers than to others. In short, one can state that perceived value is subjective, relative, context-driven and interactive (Holbrook, 1999). In the following, we accept the above definition of consumer value.

## 2.4. Integrated models

In the purely economic viewpoint where consumers are hypothesized to pursue a value- and utility-maximizing behavior whereas companies to seek to increase the gap between the production costs and the actual exchange value (i.e. profit) (value exchange model) (Rekettie, 1997). The traditional interpretation of exchange value is illustrated in Figure 3.

**Figure 3. The model of exchange value**



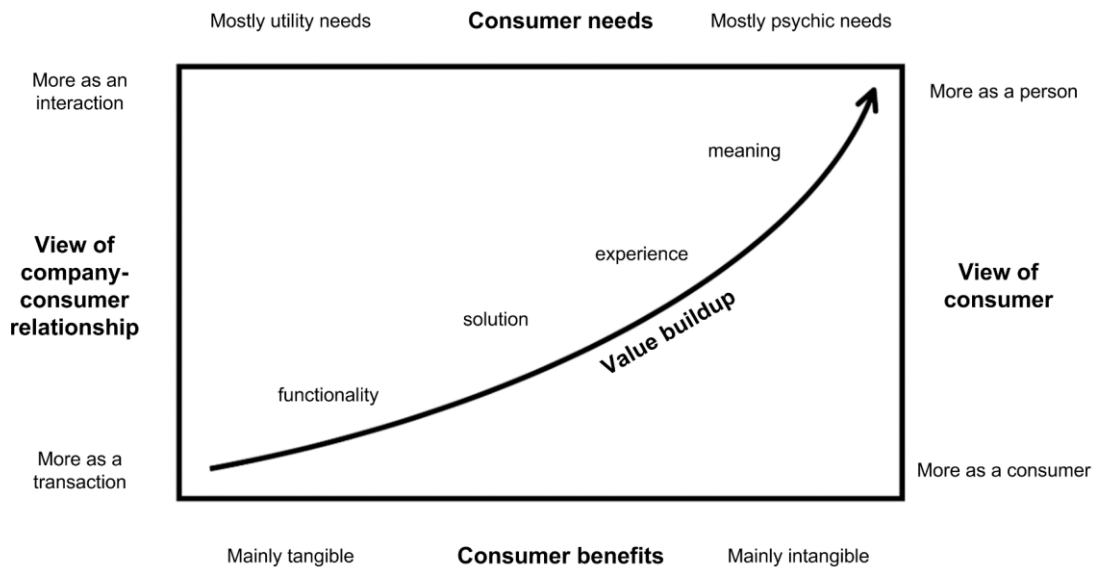
Source: based on Khalifa (2004: 656), Rekettie (1997: 18)

In contrast to the traditional perception of exchange value, the notion of value-in-use is increasingly present in the literature on consumer value (Payne – Holt, 2001; Porter, 1998). According to this latter, consumer value stems from the use rather than the exchange of a product.

The more a service is complex, the more attributes consumers need to evaluate – and the less price weighs as a decision criterion, even less in the case of technologically saturated products with rapid obsolescence, as well as in that of expensive, high-involvement products with high social risks of purchase. According to Mahajan and Wind (2002) consumers' pre-purchase information need is surprisingly low, due, among others, to their limited capacity of information processing and a saturation of available information (Johnson, 2012), leaving emotions and product promises as a major decision factor. Unless the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance arises (i.e. the product does not meet consumer expectations), objective product attributes thus become secondary.

Developing the concept of value-in-use, Khalifa (2004) highlights the importance of psychic value. In his integrative model, he distinguishes four main categories that determine consumers' perception of value: (1) consumer needs, (2) consumer benefits, (3) the nature of the relationship between the supplier and the consumer, and (4) the perceived treatment or view of the consumer by the supplier (Figure 4). The model places a product's functionality (and thus utility value) on the lowest level of total consumer value.

**Figure 4. The consumer value buildup model**



**Source: Khalifa (2004: 657)**

Beyond perceived value of product attributes, perceived added value appears as a direct antecedent of brand love in Batra et al.'s (2012) model: in case a consumer is satisfied with a consumed product, their commitment towards that product is strengthened to potentially trigger a "loyalty loop" (Court et al., 2009; Gáti et al., 2013). A loyalty loop, however, does not necessarily imply brand loyalty (Reichheld, 1994), rather a shortened decision-making process, a greater propensity to consume the given brand among many others (i.e. top-of-mind) and a facilitated information processing and potential sharing of its marketing messages, thus leading to user-generated, positive word-of-mouth (Edelman, 2010) and earned media to the brand (Corcoran, 2009). Brand love thus

contributes to business performance by triggering consumer outcomes like brand loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, resistance towards negative word-of-mouth, the willingness to pay a quality premium (Batra et al., 2012) or a shortened information search cycle. However, these dimensions of brand loyalty only apply until the consumer perceives the brand as significantly superior to the others on the market (Khalifa, 2004), once again highlighting the **subjective** and **dynamic** nature of the concept.

Consumers evaluate their relationship to the company along their own personal value system. Consumers evaluate their relationship to the company along their own personal value system. Van Dijck and Nieborg (2009) note that the majority of consumers do not aim to actively participate in the latter relationship, and do not require higher order interactions from brands they like and keenly settle for an "I don't call them, and they don't call me" type of relationship (Barnes, 1997: 771), which they can equally judge as a suitable (smooth, useful, etc.) kind of company-consumer relationship. Based on the above, a company should distinguish between **relational clients**, who deem important and require an active relationship with the company and **transactional clients**, who do not put emphasis on the affective dimensions of their relationship with the brand.

In relationship to relational consumption, it is worthwhile to mention Pine and Gilmore's (1999) view on staged experiences, according to which created experience is at the source of added value. The authors distinguish between four realms of experience, varying along the level of consumer involvement and the strength of the connection between the consumer and the environment (absorption-immersion axis (Zátori, 2014)). Thus, during (1) education the active consumer absorbs the received experience, during (2) entertainment, a more passive absorption is present. During an (3) aesthetic experience a consumer is immersed in the surrounding environment, while playing a small role in shaping it, while during an (4) escapist experience, the consumer is actively immersed in the hyperrealistic (Firat – Venkatesh, 1995; Podoshen et al., 2014) consumption environment.

However a focus on relationship and experience does not necessarily mean that no consumer value is made in a transactional consumption environment. The increased sense of freedom brought about by the company to the consumer through empowering them to exploit their own labor (e.g. self-service ATMs) or the extracted value from the reduced expectations related to various „value-added" services around the core competencies of



the company (e.g. do their shopping in discount supermarket chains; purchase of furniture in kits that require customer assembly) are equally generators of perceived customer value. In this sense, self-service, and, more broadly, minimizing company-customer interactions can be considered in some cases a form of added value and, as such, a part of value co-creation (Cova et al., 2011; Medberg – Heinonen, 2014).

The value buildup model thus contributes to a better understanding of the different perception of value between low- and high-involvement products (for more in detail, see Dörnyei, 2011: 33; Törőcsik, 2007: 177). While consumers with a high involvement are prone to process larger amounts of cognitive information (Greenwald – Leavitt, 1984), low involvement consumers can be characterized by a total lack of interest (Fagerstrøm – Ghinea, 2010). While a low involvement consumer can be characterized as a transactional client, potential users of high-involvement products have more (implicit or explicit) expectations, going beyond their functional needs.

Another significance of the value buildup model is to form a direct hierarchical link between **functionality**, **solution**, **experience** and **meanings** within the process of consumer value generation. Functionality can be related to generic product attributes (Levitt, 1983) and to meeting consumers' rational needs, solution comes back to what can be referred to as a consumer-centric view of business, experience is the extension of perceived benefits beyond the mere product or service itself, while meanings imply meeting consumers' most abstract social or psychic needs.

According to Khalifa (2004: 658), meaning “magnifies the worth to the experience”, referring to the fact that meanings are those elements of the act of consumption that affect long-term memory and through which from a one-time experience consumption becomes an ideological and philosophical act that support an individual's views, values (in a social-psychological sense) and self-realization. Various studies emphasize the importance of the consumption experience in the personal functions of entertainment, experience and self-realization (see e.g. Holbrook, 2000; Schmitt, 1999). There is empirical evidence that in case of relational clients and real company-consumer relationships, marketing communications through experiences do effectively contribute to building brand equity (Fransen – Van Rompay, 2011). Estimating the value of earned media in the POE (paid/owned/earned) categorization (Corcoran, 2009) of an

organization's marketing communications activity can be considered one attempt to measuring the equity generated on the consumer side. Indeed, the presence of consumer-generated contents with relevant brand connections can be considered as the effect of an organization's communication activity, while the value of the earned media space can be computed on the basis of paid media pricing.

### Exhibit 1

The world's most successful classified ad is probably one of the best illustrations to the power of consumer participation in the digital space. The touristic image campaign of Queensland (Australia)'s Great Barrier Reef used a clever marketing communications ploy, in that it didn't resort to a traditional media campaign, but rather used an indirect approach, by offering the dream job of caretaker of one of its island in a classified ad. Potential candidates were required to upload a one-minute video to the campaign's website where other users had the opportunity to watch and vote for their favorites.



**Best job in the world – classified ad (Source: <http://www.thenewspaperworks.com.au/go/news/caxton-awards-2009>, Accessed: Feb 28, 2013)**

Which is essential for the sake of the present dissertation is the amount of buzz and generated media that appeared around this ad, making it one of the most successful marketing communications efforts in recent years (leading to numerous advertising awards and making the campaign an example of choice in marketing communications classes, as well as a sample craved and copied in the profession).

In turn, the related user involvement attracted considerable interest from professional media producers and generated **USD 70 million worth of media appearance** to the campaign (with an initial investment of USD 1 million<sup>2</sup>). For this, it was not only necessary to have 35,000 applicants and more than 600 hours of videos generated by them, but also to have them recommending the website to one another, making it possible for them to express their opinion, and therefore to talk about the videos. All in all, it was necessary that users be personally involved in a content they can relate to for the message of the best job in the world or one of its related videos to spread virally.

It is important to note that videos uploaded by the users highly contributed to the campaign's success. Many applicants uploaded highly creative and entertaining videos, which other users could relate to, without necessarily knowing anything about Queensland or the campaign, or even without ever having the chance to travel there, etc. This audience can be referred to as scattering loss in traditional advertising, where the advertiser pays for reaching people who do not belong to the campaign's marketing target audience. Here however, this perception couldn't be farther from the truth. Users here were reached with the campaign's message as a bonus (i.e. not paid and called for by the advertiser) to the entertaining content that they willingly searched for and consumed.

The changing role of the consumer is indicated by the fact that generating similar entertaining contents that are farther from concrete products and offerings is a growingly important tool in marketing communications. The topicality of the subject can be seen by the recurrent opinion in the professional marketing press that content marketing is one of the most dynamic areas of the 2010 decade in the communication industry (Emarketer, 2013).

In this context, therefore, business performance largely relies upon consumers' perception of value rather than actual product attributes and performance. In this sense, the subjective perception of a brand's value, i.e. the related consumer meanings come into forward when considering to pay a price premium for an offering that is similar to its competitors in every other functional attribute. In other words, market competition is increasingly based on subjective consumer experiences (Helm – Jones, 2010), while products and services exist in a wider, service-oriented ecosystem (Akaka et al., 2014). It is then the task of the organization's marketing activity to map and interpret this culturally embedded consumer logic (Medberg – Heinonen, 2014).

It is equally the presence of the emotional factor that allows the company to convert its value propositions, through its marketing communications activities, in a broad sense, into relevant consumer meanings (Chapter 4).

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<sup>2</sup> Bryant, N. (2009). 'Selling' Queensland with a dream job. *BBC News*, URL: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8027369.stm>, Accessed: Feb 28, 2013.

### 3. THE ROLE OF CONSUMER PARTICIPATION IN CREATING MARKETING VALUE

#### 3.1. Social environment: The growing importance and role of consumers

In order to be able to put relationship and content into the focus of a study of these constructs as a communication and marketing activity, one first has to examine the surrounding economic and social environment. The role of postmodern marketing (Mitev – Horváth, 2008) is to reach consumers in a changing environment, where consumers often redefine their role and relationship with the organization and its offering. One of the most important aspects of the phenomenon is **consumer empowerment**.

##### 3.1.1. Consumer empowerment vs. empowering consumers

Consumers feel empowered in relationship with an organization when they can experience and enjoy the process of consumption. In this respect, the notion of consumption cannot be diminished to the sole act of purchasing, as it is part of a wider experience. Adequate information or a pleasant marketing environment can be a success factor by dint of the subsequent satisfaction and empowerment (Wright et al., 2006).

Kucuk and Krishnamurthy (2007) distinguish between four factors of consumer empowerment: (1) technological, (2) economic, (3) social, and (4) political/legal.

The source of technological empowerment is the decentralized and uncontrollable aspect of the digital communication sphere. The digital environment have extended the human communication space to a level never experienced before. The decentralized digital networking and interpersonal communication (which is referred to as consumer-to-consumer or C2C communication in marketing) are equally remodeling the spaces of mass communication. Thus the traditionally one-way mass media is becoming more and more bidirectional, while the time and space restrictions of interpersonal communication are eroding (Griffin, 2003). However (and as a consequence of the previous matters) the

notions of time and space are getting radicalized, and immediacy is becoming an increasingly important social decision criterion beside (and even instead of) soundness (van Dijck, 2006). In the aspect of marketing we can talk about a technology-oriented strategy, if the company-originated empowerment of the consumer is reflected in the development of information-based and consumer-oriented marketing strategies, which have the aim to make possible and at the same time control this empowerment. These strategies on one hand contribute to building consumers' information literacy (educational objective), but on the other hand emphasize the uncontrolled nature of the process of consumers empowerment (Pires et al., 2006).

**By the term digital media we refer to a wide communication environment and infrastructure made possible by the technological aspect of consumer empowerment which contribute to establishing interactive connections between the company and its consumer and between consumers. In a narrower sense we examine the platforms of online social media. Social media is a primarily non-commercial communication space based on the free exchange of information and content among users, enabling “a variety of new and emerging sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumers intent on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities and issues” (Blackshaw – Nazzaro, 2006: 2).**

Global economy and the increased standardization of product and – more increasingly – service markets, as well as the wide scale of substitute products with similar features in most of the consumer product markets are important features are the most important features in an economic point of view. The massive spread of the internet and digital media have not caused, yet have contributed to an accelerated change of consumers' information gathering habits by extending the pool of information available to consumers before making a purchase decision. In theory, the digital platform is able to carry unlimited amounts of information, thus the basic principle of microeconomics, i.e. the perfect information could be realized in theory (Dörnyei et al., 2013). But according to another approach, the multiplication of choice opportunities (such as via digital rating systems and sites which facilitate making “time-saving” choices) are paradoxically increasing consumer uncertainty (Schwartz, 2006).

In the expanding communication sphere consumers have the opportunity to maintain their social connections actively and extensively (Bagozzi – Dholakia, 2002). A new feature of network society is that the connections between individuals and organizations are more direct, even from long distances (van Dijck, 2006). An additional social feature of the consumer empowerment is that the communication channels themselves may become parts or even bases of the social sphere (cf. the notion of social media itself) thus they extend the traditional personal social sphere. But at the same time the digital sphere is not portable to the scene of interpersonal connections: it functions along different mechanisms, rules and behavioral patterns (just to mention a few differences). Often users and even organizations present in the digital space are unaware of these rules (e.g. privacy, information security, or the aforementioned immediacy), therefore we consider it important to conduct further research in this topic.

Consumer empowerment can be described in an ethical/political perspective, where it plays a role as a source of power (Shankar et al., 2006). Some authors consider consumer empowerment as an act of voting through consumption, where participating consumers define their consumption as empowerment (Shaw et al., 2006). In this approach researchers question the process of liberal consumer empowerment; they argue that choice is the product of power, and the increased number of available options could lead to paralyzation of choice after reaching a tipping point (Shankar et al., 2006). Moreover consumer empowerment and consumer outrage together may trigger an opposite effect to that intended by the organization while empowering consumers, with the appearing phenomenon of antibranding (Krishnamurthy – Kucuk, 2009).

### **3.1.2. Communication aspects of consumer empowerment: The theory of consumer exit, voice and loyalty**

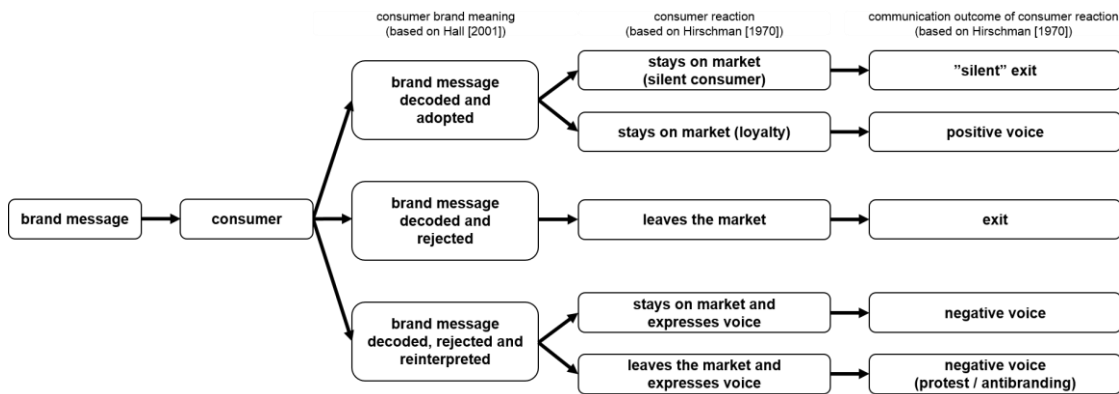
On one hand, **consumer empowerment** as a **passive** phenomenon is the result of a social-technological-economic process during which consumers are enabled to express their views and thereby to influence their own consumption. On the other hand, the empowered consumer as defined by postmodern marketing is a self-conscious, active and controlling consumer, that is capable and willing to use the instruments of control and power acquired through the process of consumption, thereby constructing own experiences and meanings around their acts of consumption. In a research standpoint, it is therefore justified to put

consumer value creation into the focus, which may serve as a basis for a postmodern marketing activity. As an effect of the above process, a certain number of consumers or groups of consumers are likely to ask a role in the value creation process of the goods they consume. The organization may respond to this demand by **actively empowering consumers** in the value creation process.

Actively empowering consumers becomes primordial for the organization in an environment where consumer empowerment as a passive phenomenon is already massively present. Consumer power was already subject to extensive research as early as in the 1960's. Then, however, information asymmetry as an effect of the ruling mass communication paradigm continued to provide organization with a strong dominant position as opposed to the organic influence of word-of-mouth then only limited to personal communications. In the communication sphere brought about by digital media, a communication based on network coproduction (Kozinets et al., 2010) becomes widely available, in which organizations instead of being a dominant actor of the communication process become only one of many peers.

Albert O. Hirschman's Exit, Voice, and Loyalty (Hirschman, 1970), based on political and organizational theory is a seminal work on research on consumer power. His work studies the options of consumers against the organization in the face of deteriorating quality of goods. According to classic economic theory, the rules of offer and demand allow consumers to shift their consumption to alternative goods, exiting the market with deteriorating quality. The traditional approach is however oversimplified in the respect that loyalty, considered as the counterpart of exit, itself occurs as a barrier to exit (e.g. psychological factors), while the organization equally resorts to various instruments (e.g. loyalty periods) to bound the consumer to their services and the purchase of various durable goods can equally mean a long-term commitment by the consumer to a given producer. To somewhat balance their limited ability to react, consumers can turn to an additional option, namely express their **voice**. In the new digital communication space, many new possibilities of self-expression come to life (Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Possible outcomes of consumers' brand meaning-making**



Source: own elaboration based on Kucuk (2014: 5)

### 3.2. The concept of participation in marketing <sup>3</sup>

We can identify a wide range of concepts that encircle audience "participation" in marketing or marketing-related (e.g. consumer behavior, marketing communications or management) literature. In order for a consumer participation to be a focal element of a piece of academic research, it is imperative to distinguish between the various related constructs and to provide a classification and a framework thereof that illustrate the logical connections between the various related terms. The following chapter responds to that need and offers a framework to the notions of consumer participation.

This cluster of participatory notions includes very different concepts that differ at the level of participation required, whether they focus on the process and how the output of the process of participation is seen. Table 1 summarizes the most frequently used notions relating to the phenomenon of participation.

<sup>3</sup> The chapter draws heavily on the works by Nyirő, Csordás & Horváth (2012) and Nyirő – Csordás (2013), being an extended and restructured version thereof. Used under written permission by the co-authors.



**Table 1. Notions of participation in the marketing literature**

Enablers / Causal antecedents of participation	
<p>Consumer empowerment (Kucuk – Krishnamurthy, 2007; Pires et al., 2006; Shankar et al., 2006; Shaw et al., 2006)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consumer empowerment as a social, technological, economic phenomenon</li> <li>• Consumer empowerment as an active, company-generated action</li> </ul>	
Activity-focused notions	Output-focused notions
<p>Engagement (Fill, 2005; Mitussis et al., 2006; Shultz, 2007)</p> <p>Involvement (Celsi – Olson, 1988; De Pelsmacker et al., 2007; Kotler et al., 2009; Peter – Olson, 1990)</p> <p>Participation (Bendapudi – Leone, 2003; Dabholkar, 1990)</p> <p>Contribution (Cook, 2008; Shultz, 2007)</p> <p>Co-creation (Lusch – Vargo, 2006; Payne et al., 2008; Prahalad – Ramaswamy, 2004)</p> <p>Co-creative labor (Banks – Deuze, 2009; Grossman, 2006; Humphreys et al., 2005; Kücklich, 2005; Terranova, 2000)</p> <p>Crowdsourcing (Brabham, 2008; Campbell et al., 2010; Howe, 2006; Whitla, 2009)</p> <p>Prosumption and Produsage (Bruns, 2009; Kotler, 1986; McKnight, 1977; McLuhan – Nevitt, 1972; Toffler, 1980; Xie et al., 2008)</p>	<p>User-Generated Content (Berthon et al., 2008; Campbell et al., 2011; Daugherty et al., 2008; Krishnamurthy – Dou, 2008; Shimp et al., 2007)</p> <p>Electronic word-of-mouth (e-wom) (Berger – Milkman, 2012; Cheung et al., 2008; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Phelps et al., 2004)</p> <p>User-led innovation (Baldwin et al., 2006; Bruns, 2008; Humphreys et al., 2005; von Hippel, 1978)</p>

Source: Own elaboration

The activity-focused elements highlight the importance of consumer activity while output-focused elements highlight the result, or achievement of participation. It is important to note that for each element of consumer participation, an active empowerment from the organization is required. This latter can be accomplished by the organization by, for example, establishing the framework for the participation of its consumers. It is also important to note that consumer empowerment as a social phenomenon results in empowerment being a more general, grassroots activity, often taking this framework out from under the control of the organization. This phenomenon already appears in the new

definition of marketing presented in the introduction and has a primordial role in the phenomena presented throughout the dissertation.

The various notions in the marketing literature related to consumer participation can assist in identifying the various touchpoints of consumer-company interactions that lead to an interactive communication between the two stakeholders and to a process of value creation. Value creation in this context is interpreted in its broadest sense, where the output of the value creation process can range from mere information through shared experiences, new ideas to concrete solutions provided by users to the development of a product. In the following sections we introduce the participation-related notions one by one, emphasizing the differences and specificities of the concepts.

### 3.2.1. Activity-focused notions of participation

#### Engagement

Shultz (2007) redefines marketing as constructive engagement and emphasize the importance of a macro-level focus providing the possibility of constructive engagement (both political and managerial) ending in long term benefits, win-win outcomes and enhanced marketing systems. In a constructive engagement, negotiation, cooperation, and exchange are important components, in contrast with control, consumption and authority. This approach largely supports that of postmodern marketing (Mitev – Horváth, 2008).

In order for engaging consumers, the organization itself needs to be engaged, i.e. to actively initiate the company-consumer interactions and to provide the above-mentioned framework for being able to handle these interaction on a corporate level. **Marketing communications play a crucial role in fostering engagement by providing "the means by which brands and organizations are presented to their audiences.** The goal is to stimulate a dialogue that will, ideally, lead to succession of purchase. Complete engagement." (Fill, 2005: 9). This also means that marketing communications are an audience-centered activity (Fill, 2005).

Other marketing researchers argue for developing a grounded understanding of consumers, considering consumer behavior with engagement as a necessity when developing consumer relationships (CRM) that allow for an ideological disposition to interactive engagement and learning (Mitussis et al., 2006). Of course new media and the internet as a platform have distinctive capabilities for customer engagement, including interactivity, enhanced reach, persistence, speed, and flexibility (Sawhney et al., 2005) and provide a unique opportunity for organizations to use these capabilities to engage customers in collaborative co-creation processes.

We can see that the engagement concept includes macro and micro level perspectives as well and has a clear process and activity focus from the side of the firm resulting in a special company-consumer relationship and purchase, as opposed to involvement which is an intrinsic psychological feature proper to each consumer.

### **Involvement**

Kotler et al. (2009:255) define consumer involvement as “the level of engagement and active processing the consumer undertakes in responding to a marketing stimulus”. The level of **personal relevance** is an essential characteristic of involvement (Celsi – Olson, 1988). Involvement is first all of linked to the buying process and marketers are exhorted to use different marketing strategies in case of low and high involvement products. In marketing communications literature, involvement can be defined as the importance people attach to a product or buying decision, the extent to which one has to think it over and the level of perceived risk associated with an inadequate brand choice (de Pelsmacker et al., 2007: 70).

Marketing literature differentiates products and buying decisions as being high or low involvement, and states that high involvement consumers are more likely to process large amounts of cognitive information (Greenwald – Leavitt, 1984). The generally low-involvement nature of mass products (e.g. mass media) makes it is crucial for organizations to identify how they can trigger higher levels of consumer involvement and thereby additional added business value and competitive advantage to their activity.

Involvement refers to consumers' subjective perception of the personal relevance of an object activity or situation and emphasize that involvement is a psychological state experienced by a consumer in a given situation (Peter – Olson, 1990: 85). Of course it is important to recognize that people may be involved in many ways, even beliefs about products or brands. In summary the term involvement in marketing is related to the consumer–product relationship resulting in felt involvement, which is influenced by intrinsic self-relevance (consumer and product characteristics) and situational self-relevance (situational context and product characteristics) (Peter and Olson, 1990:88).

## Participation

The notion and phenomenon of (consumer) participation is far from being new in the marketing literature. In a marketing point of view consumer participation has been defined as “the degree to which the customer is involved in producing and delivering the service” (Dabholkar, 1990: 484). Extending this construct, Meuter and Bitner (1998, in Bendapudi – Leone, 2003) distinguish between three types of service production: firm production, joint production, and customer production. **Firm production** is a situation in which the product is produced entirely by the firm and its employees, with no participation by the customer. **Joint production** is a situation in which both the customer and the firm's contact employees interact and participate in the production. **Customer production** is a situation in which the product is produced entirely by the customer, with no participation by the firm or its employees. Bendapudi and Leone (2003) provide a chronological review of the literature on customer participation in production which shows that participation in production has already appeared in the marketing literature as early as 1979.

It may seem that consumer participation is attributed mainly positive aspects, though a number of studies (e.g. Chan et al., 2010) also imply that it can be a double-edged sword for firms. Consumer participation can enhance customers' economic value attainment and strengthen the relational bond between customers and employees. Parallel to this, employee's stress levels caused by the amount of additional tasks may equally rise, which may deteriorate their work satisfaction and in the long run, affect the firm's value-generation capability. All in all, Chan et al. (2010) highlight the fact that the success of

consumer participation largely depends on participants' (consumers and employees) cultural differences.

One must note that the concepts of involvement, engagement and participation are highly interrelated. The marketing literature often resorts to using one in order to define the other. The main difference, as we endeavored to outline, is on the focus and nature of the activity involved. Thus while engagement has a process and activity focus which stems from a calculated effort of the firm, involvement is more consumer-related and can be one effect of a firm's engagement activity. A high level of consumer involvement will eventually affect the mode of consumer participation which thus acts as a measure of success for a firm's engagement activity.

### **Prosumption and produsage**

The goal of marketers and companies is to sell their products and services to people rather than performing these services for themselves (McKnight, 1977), which generates a clear contradiction between marketing and the producer-consumer phenomenon. This shifting role of consumers to producers, facilitated by electronic technology, had already been predicted in 1972 by McLuhan and Nevitt (1972: 4).

The term "prosumer", a portmanteau formed by a contraction of the words "professional" or "producer" with the word "consumer", was introduced by Toffler (1980). Toffler (1980) suggested a future economy in which "leisure time" is redefined as "unpaid work": people will never hold a full-time job, but spend extensive time "producing<sup>2</sup> their own goods and services with immensely enhanced self-helping technologies. He envisioned a do-it-yourself economy where the number of consumers declines as everyone produces more and more things (products) for themselves. This concept was provocative enough to attract the attention from other authors, including Philip Kotler (1986). Kotler (1986) criticizes the empirical evidence used by Toffler and adds that if Toffler is right then marketers will face a highly frustrating future. In addition, Kotler (1986) states that prosumption activities will have to have four main characteristics: high cost saving, requiring minimal skill, consuming little time and effort, and yielding high personal satisfaction (e.g. house painting). Marketers have to focus on those products and services

which do not meet these requirements (e.g. car repairing). Kotler (1986) proposes to look for opportunities in order to facilitate prosumption activities like creating better tools for prosumers and simplifying the products.

It is of course hardly conceivable that many people will opt for 100 percent prosumption as they will be more attracted by the hedonist, easier living lifestyle provided by growing economies and subsequent welfare. But more importantly in this context, Kotler (1986: 512) identifies two clear types of prosumers: the avid hobbyist, who "who fill their leisure time with one or a few dominant hobbies" and the archprosumers "who practice a lifestyle of 'voluntary simplicity' that is closer to nature and produce many things themselves". Even though Kotler studies the notion of "prosumer" as it was used by Toffler, we argue that prosumerism may have different levels ranging from Toffler's view of producing as many products and services as possible, to participating in the production flow as a consumer, and being part of producing for others as well. Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) mention a new capitalism based on the phenomenon of prosumerism, where organizations not only provide the possibility to participate, but also take a step back and leave the activities of production and consumption to consumers, keeping only the responsibilities for providing a necessary framework or space for consumers in doing so. According to Zwick et al. (2009), the prosumption phenomenon contributes to taking advantage of the economic value that lies in social cooperation and thus helps in bridging the gap between the activities of production and consumption. Comor (2010) argues that people participate in prosumption in at least three discernible ways (powerless tools of capital, creative tools to capital, people with genuine prosumption potential).

Xie et al (2008) provide a theoretical model of consumers as co-creators of value through empirical research supporting prosumption. According to their definition, prosumption consists of "value creation activities undertaken by the consumer that result in the production of products they eventually consume and that become their consumption experiences." (Xie et al., 2008:110). This definition is consistent with the notion of "value co-creation" (Lusch and Vargo 2006: 284), but wider than Dalbhoukar's (1990) notion of participation, and more in line with Meuter and Bitner (1998, in Bendapudi and Leone, 2003).

According to Bruns (2009), the tofflerian image of the prosumer still has considerable influence on our understanding of the collaborative processes of content creation. He states that Toffler's prosumer is "clearly not the self-motivated creative originator and developer of new content". According to Bruns (2009) the terms "production" and "consumption" do not correspond well with the creative and collaborative participation of consumers:

In his produsage model, Bruns (2009) stresses that the traditional production – distribution – consumption models include the notion of prosumer as well, whilst maintaining the traditional industrial value chain. In contrast, in postindustrial or informational economic models the production of ideas takes place in a collaborative, participatory environment, breaking down the boundaries between producers and consumers. This new context enables all participants to be users as well as producers of information and knowledge – frequently in a hybrid role where usage is necessarily also productive and participants become produsers. The outputs of produsage processes are not discrete products but rather quickly developing and growing revisions of exciting content (e.g. Wikipedia).

## Contribution

User-contribution systems consist of active and passive types of possible contribution providing various types of user input that are valuable for others. Active contribution covers audience or user participation in content creation and social networking. Consumer contribution has clear advantages at the level of cost, scalability and competitive advantage (Cook, 2008). Cook's (2008) concept of contribution is in line with Schultz's (2007) concept of win-win results of marketing collective engagement. The motives behind contribution may be that it is a practical solution providing immediate reward (e.g. access to extra services), social rewards (being part of community of common interest), reputation, self-expression or altruism. In Table 2 we give a summary of consumer and corporate benefits of contribution in different processes. We can see that consumer contribution in different company processes results in better information, entertainment, personalization or sense of ownership on the consumer side. These can be considered as **factors of consumer value creation**, which alone are enough to **motivate consumer**

**contribution.** Parallel to this, the company gains through improved satisfaction, increased loyalty, awareness, engagement or through potential cost effectiveness.

**Table 2. Consumer/user and company benefits through contribution**

	Consumer service	Marketing	Human resources	Capital investment	Design & Development	Production
<b>Consumer advantages</b>	Immediate better information	Info & entertainment, sense of community	Empowerment	Fine tuned, personalized services	Recognition, sense of ownership	Entertainment, sense of ownership
<b>Company advantages</b>	Improved customer satisfaction	Increased awareness and loyalty	Employee engagement	Reduced cost of capital, revenue from subscription service	Reduced costs	Inexpensive talents, huge advertising value

Source: own summary based on Cook (2008)

## Co-creation

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2002) mention a connection of co-creation between consumers and companies, and Lusch and Vargo (2006) also use co-creation of value when defining the basics of new marketing logic. In this consumer-centric view the consumer is an integral part of the value creation system. Thus the consumer may influence where, when, and how value is generated and disseminated; they need not to respect industry boundaries in the search for value; they can compete with companies for value extraction; and multiple points of exchange can be identified where the consumer and the company can co-create value. Payne et al. (2008) make no distinction between participation in production or co-production (see Bendapudi and Leone, 2003) and co-creation (Lusch and Vargo, 2006) and propose the usage of the latter term and concept. At the same time Etgar (2008) introduces the concept of co-production and specifies five distinct phases of the production activity chain that function as touchpoints for users to become involved in co-production.

Van Dijck and Nieborg (2009) argue that the concept of co-creation and other contemporary notions have to be introduced into mainstream economic discourse while one ought to put aside the undifferentiated concepts of users and platforms. They claim that rather than defending or attacking the cult(ure) of participation, mass creativity or



co-creation, one needs to approach the socio-economic implications of these emerging trends in a more critical way. The complex offerings brought about by a service-dominant economy facilitates the interpretation of the notion of value co-creation: consumption, as an embedded cultural act brings perceived and symbolic value elements into the fore. It is also important to note that **co-creation can only begin when consumers or groups of consumers become willing to avail themselves of the opportunities they have been empowered with by the organization by engaging into a process of communication with the organization.**

Thus way we can conclude that the continuous two-way communication process will act as the scene of co-creation between the organization and its consumers or other stakeholders. This presupposes that the organization be able to actively and effectively engage its stakeholders in the process of co-creation.

### Co-creative labor and crowdsourcing

Consumers' participation has a clear labor aspect as the various definitions of co-creation include the process and value of consumer activation (i.e. consumers becoming active participants from a passive public). Applied conceptualizations of consumer participation thus lead to potentially include free (or very cheap) consumer labor for firms, as Terranova (2000) states in her article "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy" that she foregrounds by adding that there are tensions and contradictions around participation as being pleasurably embraced and at the same time often shamelessly exploited. The famous 2006 Time magazine article celebrating "YOU" as the person of the year also reasons that these activities position creative consumers as "working for nothing and beating the pros at their own game" (Grossman, 2006). Others argue that we have to consider this topic with careful attention, how work or labor terms are reshaped and negotiated within the context of emerging co-creative relationship for mutual benefit by participants themselves (both professional and non-professional, commercial and non-commercial) (Banks – Deuze, 2009). We may also cite the notions playbour which also describes the phenomenon of merging free time, entertainment activities (play) and work (Kücklich, 2005) as well as game labor or fun production (Humphreys et al. 2005). Co-creative labor can equally be considered as a manifestation of consumer value creation through experiences. As such, solutions that trigger an

experience of flow during the time spent with the brand become tool of product differentiation and as such a novel element of the marketing communication toolbox (Novak et al., 2000).

Such novel forms of consumer cooperation and participation mean a novel source of human resource for organizations (for- and non-profit organization, e.g. governmental, non-governmental organizations and other not-for-profit institutions alike). The above approaches highlight the importance of the phenomenon of consumer empowerment at the deepest level of an organization's structure, i.e. the planning and management of human resources.

As such, the notion of crowdsourcing equally pertains to labor theory, being a novel form of outsourcing which is well-known and frequently used business solution to solve non-core competence-related functions of firms. Crowdsourcing is a process where – with the aim of meeting a more comprehensive, innovative, different solution – companies outsource a sub-unit of their processes (e.g. a concrete task) for a – generally online – community and offer payment for anyone within the crowd who completes the task the best and fastest (Howe, 2006). Crowdsourcing thus accentuates the mass participation aspect so that “the crowd” appears as a participatory agent.

The potential for the future use of crowdsourcing in marketing was identified in three areas: product development, advertising and promotion and market research (Whitla, 2009) while Campbell et al. (2010) argue that crowdsourcing is a potential and relevant marketing research tool, however agencies and advertisers have to use it carefully. Brabham (2008) identifies the user-generated advertisement as a typical form of crowdsourcing.

## Conclusion

All notions of participation indicate that there is an exchange between the company and its consumers or audiences, which is expected to result in some beneficial outcomes that could be a product, an idea or a message. In our point of view these notions are not different, but all focus on different aspects of the interaction and exchange, should that be at the level of the consumer or on that of the market, and should that focus on the

production or consumption process, or on the level or amount of contribution made by and expected from the audience.

In Table 3 we give a summary of the used terms and their major focal points in relation to processes and outcomes involved, as they were discussed before.

**Table 3. Activity-focused notions of participation and their scope**

Notion	Process / Activity	Output
Engagement	conversation / communication / interaction between company and consumer	successful exchange
Involvement	consumer interest, motivation	successful choice
Participation	production (company and consumer together; consumer alone)	product relational bond
Prosumption	production by the consumer	producer consumer corporate facilitation
Produsage	productive usage	continuously developing content and meaning
Contribution	(corporate) input transformation (by audiences)	rewards (immediate, social, reputation, self expression)
Co-creation	integrated corporate and consumer creation of value	mutual values
Co-creative labor	working roughly for free	mutual benefits for company and consumer
Crowdsourcing	community creation for corporate call	content created by community

Source: own elaboration

### 3.2.2. Output-focused notions of participation

The output-focused concepts of participation highlight the result or achievement of participation. In these cases it is not the role or the action of consumers (or the audience) which relates to the concept of participation, but the output achieved by them.

#### User-generated content

User-generated content (UGC) in the majority of cases stems from the mass use of digital media technologies. Content created by users can correspond to every traditional type of

content, including content accessible via professional media services (text, image, audio and audiovisual content). User-generated content is ubiquitous in e-media and e-marketing, and its rapid growth contributed to creating some of the most successful digital brands, like YouTube or Wikipedia and to becoming a focal element in marketing and marketing communications.

Claiming authorship of UGC is often problematic by dint of the characteristics of the transmitting media. Thus way UGC is generally located in the public domain or under a "Creative Commons" license, which offer content creators a simple set of standardized ways "to grant copyright permissions to their creative work" (Creative Commons, n.d.).

The frequent "ugliness"<sup>4</sup> of the amateur internet contents is a byproduct of the medium's peculiarities, namely its speed and lack of gatekeepers (e.g. professional editors). This however adds to these contents' perceived authenticity. As Douglas (2014) refers to it, "Internet Ugly" is not the only core norm of the medium, it however is "the best that defines internet against all other media" (Douglas, 2014: 315, emphasis added). More, based on the above, spontaneous and even "ugly" contents cannot be referred to as a specific genre of the internet. Thus, vernacular creativity (Russo, 2009: 125) rather than a genre, is a whole cultural dialect on its own, with its own "linguistic" rules.

A few authors consider user-generated content and amateur user contributions as synonymous. According to Douglas (2014), the essence of the internet as a new medium is to give extensive attention to the amateurish, the accidental, and the surprise hit. The audience is more than open to consume "average", non-professional or even amateur contents (Paek et al., 2011). The digitization of content and the democratization and availability of content editing tools growingly allow users to use available content to expressing their own meanings, therefore to reinterpret, manipulate, reedit them, and thus to establish themselves as full-fledged content providers and editors (Russo, 2009).

UGC's frequent simplicity and lack of aesthetics is partly due to so-called "web2.0 applications". These applications can be said to be at the core of social media's success by allowing mass content production (e.g. through content templates<sup>5</sup>) and publishing.

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<sup>4</sup> E.g. hastily drawings, amateur-like video editing and effects, typos and grammatical errors in texts, etc.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. online mobile photo-sharing application Instagram. The application offers users the possibility to make and publish photos with a unique style, making it possible for them to apply various artistic-like filters on "average" (both in terms of technology and content) mobile photos and to provide them with accompanying texts.

The lack of aesthetics on the other hand can be the result of a conscious choice as well, in order to emphasize a perceived peer status (see e.g. Paek et al., 2011).

**Table 4. Main differences between traditional advertising and user-generated contents**

		Traditional advertising	UGC
		top-down (controlled activity)	grassroots (voluntary diffusion)
diffusion	initiated by	finite (on paid channels)	organic (earned media)
	diffusion	controlled diffusion (on paid channels –media-mix)	viral / memetic diffusion (content is a replicator in its own right)
	control	planned / predictable (on paid channels)	unpredictable / natural selection (no predefined diffusion pattern)
	reach	specific (primary) target audience	general / meta-audience (by default); specific (primary) audience (for certain specific messages)
	target audience		
intellectual property		ownership over content	public domain (originally intended as such, or otherwise expropriated by the users)
channels		reserved / exclusive (paid) channels high (ad) clutter	public space (shared with other contents) high (general) clutter
meanings		intended	various (accepted / shared / negotiated / dissent)
style		artificial / stylized	natural / free (from the profane to the stylized)

Source: ownl collection, based on Bauckhage (2011), Katyal (2010), Kucuk (2014), Jenkins et al. (2013), Williams (2000)

In the context of internet memes<sup>6</sup> – as a specific form of UGC – Zittrain (2014: 389) notes that "a meme at its best exposes a truth about something, and in its versatility allows that truth to be captured and applied in new situations", thereby making their role to "make the web sing, if in an off-key note". By their mass and popularity these moment contribute altogether to a new norm-generation process by the internet folk based on spontaneity and bone-deep honesty (Zittrain, 2014). The mass availability of UGC also lead to new content consumption and communication patterns (Jenkins, 2006).

Despite UGC's extraordinary growth, advertisers and advertising agencies still remain hesitant to venture into this unproven context. Their concerns stem from a fear of intruding on a "consumer" environment, a lack of understanding of UGC users and their behavior, and a lack of control over the context in which their advertising gets exhibited. (Clark, 2007 in Krishnamurthy – Dou, 2008) (Table 4). However, a corporate presence in

<sup>6</sup> For more in detail about internet memes, see Chapter 7.

the social sphere (i.e. social media) could legitimize the role of UGC as a full-fledged media (Krishnamurthy – Dou, 2008) and therefore contribute to integrating it into the marketing (communication) toolkit. The emerging quantity and consumption of UGC forces academic and market research to provide implications for advertisers through a comprehensive analysis of their business models and the interactions among key stakeholders (Krishnamurthy – Dou, 2008). Table 5 presents a summarizing classification of UGC.

**Table 5. Typology of UGC Classification and Examples**

Platform base	Group	Psychological Motivation for Engaging in UGC Creation			
		Rational		Emotional	
		Knowledge Sharing	Advocacy	Social connections	Self-Expression
		online databases, wikis (e.g. Wikipedia)	issue-centric communities (e.g. Rachel Ray Sucks community)	multiplayer online games (e.g. World of Warcraft)	virtuális presences (e.g.. Second Life)
	Individual	professional / expert blogs, message boards (e.g. askanexpert. blog.com); general knowledge-sharing sites (e.g. ask.com)	consumer reviews (e.g. Epinion)	social networking sites (e.g. Facebook)	creative consumer inventions (e.g. Lego Ideas)

Source: based on Krishnamurthy – Dou (2008)

Regarding the motivations for creating UGC, the positive attitude towards UGC and consumption of UGC were found to have relevant explanatory power (Daugherty et al. 2008). User generated content clearly focuses on the content output of consumers' participatory production, while it includes all types of content independently from the goal and motives of content creation or the form of the content (text, image, film, etc.).

**Consumer-generated advertisements (CGA)** – as a special type of user-generated content – can vary from modifying elements of a company's advertising material (e.g. by distorting the meaning, the imagery, etc.) through uploading original variations on a theme of a company's advertising material (e.g. humorous, subvert variations called

spoofs [i.e. the practice of subvertising]) to proposing original materials in order to, for example, close a gap in a company's advertising campaign.

Berthon et al. (2008:7) define "consumer-generated ads" as "any publicly disseminated, consumer-generated advertising messages whose subject is a collectively recognized brand". They base their notion on two main determinants: subject and dissemination. They argue that even though consumers may create ads about almost anything (themselves, their families, their friends, etc.) consumer-generated advertisements have to be specifically targeted at collectively recognized brands. The nature of a brand as an asset makes the issue of consumer-generated brand ads so critical. The dissemination is crucial as CGA may affect a brand only if it is collectively disseminated through some form of media. Table 6 provides a typology of CGA based on one hand on the relationship towards the official brand message (i.e. whether it is assonant or dissonant with it), and on the other, on whether it addresses the brand in question in a negative or positive way.

**Table 6. Types of consumer-generated advertisements**

Nominal relationship to official brand message	Underlying message about brand	
	Negative	Positive
	Assonant	Dissonant
	Dissonant	Assonant
	<b>Subversive</b> (the surface text is in accord with the official brand message, but the subtext of the ad is clearly negative, often use parody to subvert and undermine the dominant brand message)	<b>Concordant</b> (surface text and subtext are in accord; nominal text of the ad is in agreement with that of the brand message, underlying subtext or message is positive in attitude towards the brand)
	<b>Contrarian</b> (clearly off-message and implicitly negative towards the brand, undermine, question, or attach a contrarian meaning to the brand message)	<b>Incongruous</b> (the surface message is dissonant with that of the official brand message, the underlying text is generally positive towards the brand)

Source: own illustration based on Berthon et al. (2008: 14)

A lampoon of a brand's ad might as well be categorized as "concordant" in case the message is not necessarily negative and deteriorating and both the audience and the responding firm wink and nod, the firm accepting a criticism on one hand and carrying on with their own brand building. In case the consumer-generated material is inevitably deteriorating to the firm (i.e. **antibranding**), which occurrence is more likely in the case of well renowned brands (referred to as the double jeopardy effect (Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009)), then the firm should classify it as "subversive" and respond accordingly.

“Contrarian” and “incongruous” types of CGA are less of a direct threat to the firm in the sense that although the message conveyed is not in accordance with the official communication and messages of the firm, it cannot be directly retraced to and tallied with by the audience and therefore follows a route on its own as an advertising or anti-advertising message.

It is important to note that beside the term "user-generated content (UGC)", other terms appear in the literature to denote the same or similar concepts. Among these are self-generated advertisement (Shimp et al., 2007), consumer-generated content (CGC) (e.g. Iyanna et al., 2012), consumer-generated media (CGM) (Blackshaw – Nazzaro, 2006) or the above-mentioned consumer-generated advertisements (CGA). However, based on the above, **we argue for the use of the term user-generated content** for various reasons. First, we deem that the term "content" is the most comprehensive, yet it is still sufficiently narrow to denote a specific topic that covers various fields like advertising and media. Second, in the controversial relationship between the notions of "consumer" and "user" (see Chapter 4.3), that of "user" forms a more permissive category. Indeed, on a many-to-many platform which is based on anonymity and free speech, anyone can be the user, and the company is only one of the many stakeholders (Smith, 2009). Moreover, as corporate communications begin to follow the audience's consumption patterns, they begin to take an ever more similar form (a corporate practice referred to as stealth marketing), making it literally impossible to correctly identify the true source of a piece of content, as well as to determine whether a brand-related content was paid- or unpaid-for (Katyal, 2010).

In their study, Shimp et al. (2007) asked consumers to write personal testimonials about their brand-related experiences. Their research shows that these testimonials positively affect consumers' evaluative judgments, but as the testimonials are motivated by external rewards, participants tend to exaggerate their statements. The idea of voluntary sharing of positive brand mentions in exchange of various incentives equally appears in a paper by Kozinets et al. (2010). The authors however highlight an exclusionary behavior on behalf of the audience in case it turns out that a positive brand mention has been a result of corporate influence. It is then primordial for advertisers to not only understand and



follow consumer-generated advertisements but also to map feedback from ad hoc consumer opinions in the form of comments or discussions (Campbell et al., 2011).

Forrai (2006) notes that in a business point of view, it is better if the advertiser does initiate user interactions. In that event, the organization can use a consumer trend or feedback as a base to further construct marketing communication value or to minimize a dissonant hijacking of brand messages by consumers. However, we have seen that the message and users' relationship with the brand may not be unquestionably positive, which means that there is no guarantee that no damaging or destructive content will be received upon a corporate call for user participation. In any event, as stated beforehand, "regardless whether or not a company participates online, consumers are constantly talking online about companies and services" (Johnston, 2011: 84).

To finish, it is important to mention the cultural importance of user-generated content. According to Kucuk (2014: 4) the idea behind consumer antibranding is to create noise in the corporation-consumer communication processes. We argue here that a fundamental aspect of the internet-enabled user-generated communications is the creation of a large quantity of noise/clutter, independently of users positively, negatively, or otherwise interpreting and intending messages - simply because one cannot expect user-generated media to be resource-optimized, as users are not economically interested in doing so, while they have effortless and costless access to the communication channels. In this ecosystem, all brand-related content (conversation, rating, account of experience, meme, etc.) is in direct competition with organizational marketing communications goals and effort for users', and potential customers' attention (Weng et al., 2012). All the more important for organizations is to map the relevant communications ecosystems and evaluate the their importance thereof in relation to their own organizational communications efforts.

## Electronic word-of-mouth (e-wom)

Forms of interpersonal communications, and word-of-mouth within were long shown to be a primary source of personal decision making (Katz – Lazarsfeld, 1955; Rogers, 1962). Electronic word-of-mouth (e-wom) communication refers to any "positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet" (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004: 39). E-wom can be initiated by a person or organization that is able to make the receiver of a message come in possession of adequate knowledge (experience, expert information, etc.) (Eszes, 2011). E-wom can be characterized as the extension of traditional word-of-mouth to new media.

E-wom present on virtual social platforms (such as message boards, user comments to posts, news feeds of social networking sites, etc.) is similar to traditional commercial information sources (e.g. in-store information, brochures, etc.) in that they are both primarily impersonal. The difference is that virtual information sources have the perceived advantage of being **organic, voluntarily shared** and non-commercial (Jepsen, 2006; Kozinets et al., 2010). Contrarily to most commercial information sources, e-wom can equally be negative (Chakravarty et al., 2010). E-wom is a novel way and channel for empowered users to express their voice (among others, in connection with organizations and brands). The anonymity of the channel involves that, e-wom, accompanied by an existing social legitimacy, requires lower standards of proof from the receivers of a piece of information, i.e. they more easily accept value judgments and accusations that can harm the organization's or brand's reputation (Forsyth, 2004: 229).

E-wom has a particularly important impact for individuals in more individualistic cultures and in the case of products with smaller user relevance (Chung – Darke, 2006). E-wom, and online discussions, message board streams, blog posts, or even online rating systems within equally form part of the broadly defined category of user-generated **content**. At the same time e-wom equally functions as a **channel** that facilitates the diffusion of information.

In the threefold categorization of e-wom described by Bughin et al. (2010) (experiential, consequential, intentional), the last category of intentional e-wom is particularly interesting for marketers. For if we accept as one of the fundamentals of e-wom that it is an organic, grassroots process, then this category goes against the most fundamental

aspect of the phenomenon. Green and Jenkins (2011: 123) note that even though a message needs to be organic for it to be shared, **in case it serves the interest of both parties** (i.e. the marketer's, sender of a marketing message, and the user's or consumer's), nobody will prevent a message from an institutional source to spread more widely. In any other case, its diffusion will be blocked by one party. Thus, for example, an organization might block the spread of a negative review by court order, however in the majority of cases, the users themselves are not engaged enough to begin spreading it.

Based on the above, one can conclude that information diffusion on digital networks is primarily a consumer-to-consumer (C2C or peer-to-peer, P2P) channel. This involves that the spread of a given information unit (e.g. a marketing message) is **unpredictable** and **uncontrollable**. Moreover, the spread of information in its initial phase is also extremely sensitive to any external factors, which can either trigger a massive spread, or prevent it (Wikström, 2010).

To share a piece of information (i.e. to include it in the cycle of word-of-mouth), a user first needs to make a number of socially embedded decisions (Green – Jenkins, 2011): is the content worthy of other users' attention, it is worthy to be shared, may a certain target group (e.g. the sender's aspirational reference group (Hofmeister-Tóth, 2003: 93)) be interested in it, which channel is best to share the content, and whether to attach a personal message when sending it (thereby modifying the meaning of the original content).

### User-led innovation

User-led innovation emphasizes the user's participation in innovation and their existing and relevant initiative disposition for innovation. Researchers first mention the phenomenon of user-led innovation as early as in the 1970's (von Hippel, 1978). A user-led innovation begins when one or more users of a product recognize new design opportunities – a so-called “design space” – and begin to explore it (Baldwin et al., 2006: 1291).

A specific type of these innovations is participatory (or communicative / cooperative) design where the manufacturer tries to involve all the affected users into parts or the whole design and improvement processes (e.g. city planning, public transport, software

development, etc.). In this context participation stands in contrast to the culture of specialists and experts (Schuler – Namioka, 1993).

According to von Hippel (2005) a distinction can be made between user innovation and manufacturer innovation based on whether the final outcome of the process profits more to the consumer (e.g. the product is ameliorated – user innovation) or to the manufacturer (the product is more marketable – manufacturer innovation).

User-led innovations have especially strong influence in the cultural and creative industries (e.g. video game industry, content industry) where where an extended part of users could be identified as participants (Humphreys et al., 2005), taking part in content generation (Bruns, 2008).

Kapferer (2004) however reminds us that the “excess of democracy”, i.e. overconsidering consumer needs equally carries a number of risks. As business entities, organizations first need to fulfill the interests of owners and shareholders and thus need to be aware of their own framework and possibilities, and only then take the role of moderator in conversations with users (de Chernatony – Riley, 1998).

## Discussion

In Table 7 we show how output-related notions of participation relate and differ, highlighting what corporate consequences, in other words what marketing results they might bring.

**Table 7. Output-focused notions of participation and their scope**

Notion	Output	Result
Electronic word-of-mouth (e-wom)	Electronic recommendation of consumers	Influence on adoption, consumer decision making and buying
User-generated content (UGC)	Text, Images, audio or audio-visual content	Less influence and control of businesses, Emerging new business models
Consumer-generated advertisement (CGA)	Amateur advertisements	Advertising messages out of the control of the brand
User-led innovation	More suitable and consumer oriented innovations	Quicker, cheaper and more consumer suitable innovations

**Source: Own elaboration**

All output-focused elements of participation lead to the conclusion that not only consumers are more than ever empowered to participate at different levels in firms' business processes, but firms are also offered additional grounds for value extraction. A firm that is aware of the available processes for motivating its consumers to participate in a process of mutual creation of value, with all the opportunities and threats involved, might substantially extract added value and competitive advantage from the situation. Value is created through participation, and in its every manifestation it brings competitive advantages and considerable market value.

### **3.2.3. Organizing the notions of participation: Theoretical framework of the dissertation**

In a summary of the above, we can conclude that consumer involvement is a core source of value for an organization committing itself to a service-dominant logic of marketing (Vargo – Lusch, 2004).

A conscious process of engagement from the organization's part is a prerequisite to consumer involvement. A first step of consumer participation is that consumers in contact with an organization's marketing activity be willing to further interact with the organization.

Content-based communications play a crucial role in reaching a firm's target audiences. Beyond traditional advertising efforts, technologically empowered consumers (Krishnamurthy – Kucuk, 2009) are enabled to communicate to and with other consumers, other members of the audience and the organization. The organization thus ought to initiate a flow of communication by engaging its audiences with content (e.g. through humor, shocking messages, or various financial or other incentives), be these audiences actual or potential consumers (marketing audience) and/or consumers of the media channel (media audience) (see Chapter 4.4). One can identify two levels of activity of consumer participation: (1) e-wom generated by those who quote, share or comment on (e.g. on social media) the marketing messages issued by the organizations, (2) specific

creative content generated in response to or in connection with the organization's marketing communications activity (e.g. consumer-generated advertisements). In new media and beyond official company-generated messages, consumers are able to produce and disseminate personal contents in connection with the company in some way or another (user-generated content). User who generate brand-related content can be presumed consumer of the channels (e.g. video or image sharing sites, or social media at large) they use to disseminate their creations, thereby making them professional/producing users, i.e. **produsers**.

A content-based participation to a brand can be interpreted in the marketing framework of POE (i.e. paid-owned-earned) media (Corcoran, 2009). Earned media (i.e. everything users write unbidden) is largely influenced beside traditional unpaid-for media apparitions (e.g. presence in news) by user-generated content and electronic word-of-mouth. The organization can earn a community's respect in earned media channels (e.g. a large activity on branded [fan] pages in social media), but is unable to create these on its own. It is however primordial for the organization that this output (generated content) be advantageous for the organization and avoid consumer antibranding (Krishnamurthy – Kucuk, 2009).

An extreme case of a consumer-generated-content-driven strategy is when these form the basis of an organization's business model and it generates financial returns from these (e.g. the use of user-generated contents in a tv-programming, or possibly every social media channel built on social collaboration and content sharing [e.g. Youtube, Tumblr, Facebook, etc.]).

A firm can directly – through its marketing activity – initiate the presence of consumer participation in the production process. In the broader interpretation of participation, consumers can contribute to a firm's activity with new product ideas, or feedback about existing products (e.g. through a firm's own CRM channels or through social media). The firm can decide whether to consider these remarks in the fuzzy-front end or early development stages (Zahay et al., 2010). This way, some of the ideas can become implemented in future innovations (making them user-led innovations).

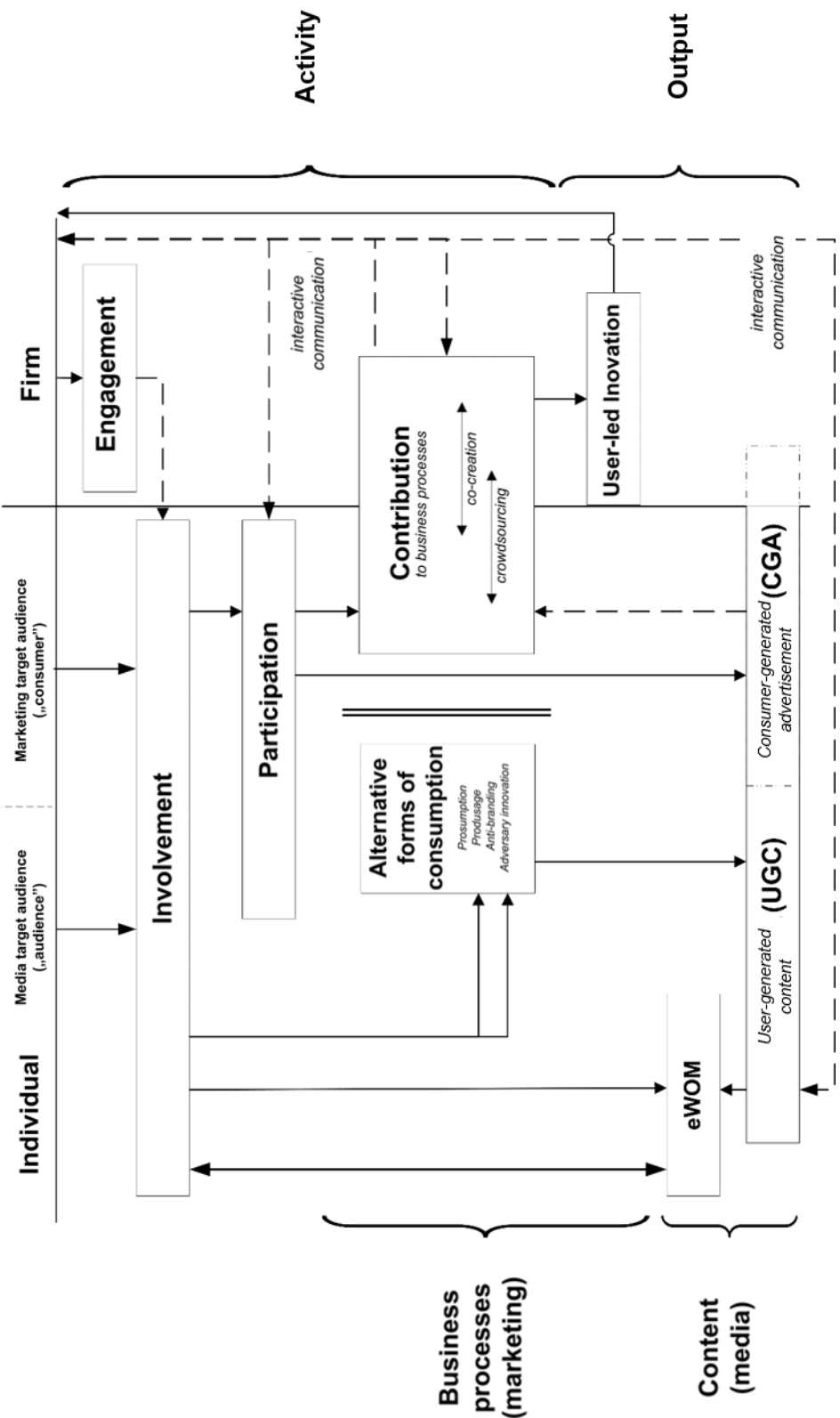
Co-creation provides a more structured framework between the company and the consumer and thus presupposes a stronger corporate control. This manifests through, e.g. the extent to which the company is willing to engage consumers in value-creating processes. The most engaged level of consumer participation is when an entire project or the full business model of a firm is based on consumer-created value. New social media spaces are an example of crowdsourcing, as the value of a social media service depends on the quantity and quality of user-generated activity there present.

The involvement of participating consumers does not necessarily mean that they turn (fully or in part) to the corporate environment to meet their needs, thereby creating alternative patterns of consumption. In the context of media companies, for example, the modularity of social media platforms makes it possible to create and install personalized extensions which are tailored to individual users' needs (e.g. gap filler applications, social media addons, or the phenomenon of modding<sup>7</sup> in video games). Content consumption situations where consumers – defying and bypassing a variety of physical and digital consumption restrictions (e.g. digital rights management systems, streaming video) – tailor their consumption activity to their own needs and expectations (e.g. downloading of Youtube videos through various extensions) can equally be regarded as prosumption activities.

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<sup>7</sup> “Modding is a slang expression that is derived from the verb "modify". Modding refers to the act of modifying hardware, software, or virtually anything else, to perform a function not originally conceived or intended by the designer, or achieve a bespoke specification. The term modding is often used within the computer game community, particularly in regard to creating new or altered content and sharing that via the web.” Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modding>, Accessed: Jun 30, 2015.

Figure 6. User participation, related taxonomy and relationships



Source: Own elaboration



The above chapter was aimed at giving an overview of the phenomenon of consumer participation by presenting the related taxonomy and interconnections thereof. Figure 6 illustrates the framework, complexity and interconnections between the various notions related to consumer participation. Our overview suggests two categorizing dimensions of participation. First, along the dimensions of completion: in our prior presentation, we categorized the notions as activity or output. Second, participation can equally be studied on the level of contribution to corporate processes. Here, one can distinguish between a (direct) contribution to business processes, i.e. a marketing function or a(n indirect) contribution as a media channel (i.e. communication function).

As a media channel, consumer participation (mainly through user-generated content) is attributed a media and marketing communication role as a unit of entertainment and as a communication channel per se. The main empirical research of the present dissertation is targeted at the study of this communication function and consumer and/or brand-relevant manifestations in digital media. These manifestations, discussions appear in a consumer-to-consumer environment through the channel of word-of-mouth.

At the same time, as revealed in the chapter, user-generated content itself can not only act as a communication function but can contribute to business processes by being a channel of communication between the company and the consumer.

A representation of this can be seen on Figure 6 through the categorization of the subjects of participation: Participating users can take up the sometimes overlapping, sometimes differing roles of product and/or media consumers (for more in detail, see Chapter 4.4).

#### **4. MANIFESTATIONS OF CONSUMER VALUE IN MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS: MEANINGS AND SOCIAL EMBEDDEDNESS**

In the following chapter we examine the forms and spaces of the manifestations of consumer value. Our main focus (following that of the empirical research of the present dissertation) is to demonstrate how value, as perceived by consumers, is manifested in a digital setting.

Marketing communications are a main channel of the company-consumer relationship and their main role therefore is to fill the brand, and the organization with positive feelings in the eyes of the consumers. In an economic point of view, the growing importance of meanings within the concept of added value is a natural consequence of a welfare society (Potts et al., 2008). In a sociological perspective, consumption itself is a socially and culturally embedded activity, and consumer creativity is a constituting element thereof (see e.g. Becker, 1982; Bourdieu, 1993). The creative use of tools is one aspect of consumer creativity. For example, the culture of short text messages (SMSs) had become a grassroots-generated success – and as such, a user-led innovation –, despite the fact that mobile services providers had not originally intended a key business role for the technology next to that of mobile voice transmission (Potts et al., 2008: 6).

We argue here that the broadly interpreted category of user-generated content, as described in Chapter 3, is an integral part of consumer creativity, going from brand mentions to full narratives of consumption experiences expressed in the digital sphere. Thus in the mapping of meanings in the digital sphere, we consider electronic word-of-mouth as a channel, to express "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004: 39).

Meaning have been extensively investigated in the literature as well in marketing communications as in psychology and various other fields. Just like that of consumer value, the notion of meanings is multidimensional, and has a variety of interpretations

throughout the various fields of research (Finne – Grönroos, 2009). The American Marketing Science Institute made "designing experiences, not products" that are "remembered, interesting, repeated, and valued" by consumers, as well as the "trust between people and their institutions and in social networks" two of their seven main research priorities for the period 2012-2014 (MSI, n.d.), which is an indication of the importance that the topic currently has in the field of marketing.

According to Mitev and Horváth (2008), the context of the act of consumption is contributes to the creation of a set of signs, experiences and meanings, through which the consumer, being the receiver and parser of this set of impulses necessarily has a greater role in the consumption process than the brand, i.e. the sender of the message might originally intend. Research shows that consumers can interpret brand messages in far wider scope and in far different ways than the brand owner has originally intended (Kozinets, 2001; Muñiz – O'Guinn, 2001; Schouten – McAlexander, 1995).

As mentioned beforehand, consumer value can be interpreted as a dynamic process (value buildup). The sum of a consumer's **past experience** with the brand constitutes one temporal dimension of consumer value and make up the current meaning thereof for them. Past experiences can be of a commercial origin (e.g. experiences at the point of purchase, during product use, advertising messages, etc.) and can equally originate from any other source with loose ties to the brand: personal conversations (word-of-mouth), browsing, etc. However, brand meaning does have another temporal dimension, that of experiences not yet lived, of which the most important are brand expectations. As brand messages can most often be associated with a promise of future consumer satisfaction (Berry, 2000; Grönroos, 2009), marketing can only succeed in constituting value through meanings if it can avoid any "communication gaps" (Parasuraman et al., 1985) i.e. if the implied or explicit promises are not at odds with actual product attributes and individual product experiences (Mahajan – Wind, 2002). The future dimension of brand meanings equally includes external elements not directly related to the brand itself (e.g. the effect of the economic crisis on consumption patterns and brand choice (Törőcsik – Jakopánecz, 2012)). The temporal dimension is particularly important in marketing communications as consumers' past experiences are of a **cumulative nature** (Helm – Jones, 2010). This

way, a company response cannot be but incremental in nature, i.e. it ought have a long term, strategic focus.

One can also distinguish between internal and external **contextual** dimensions of brand meanings. External dimensions comprise all effects of the (cultural, economic, etc.) environment on consumers. The external environment also includes competitors' marketing communications messages. Internal dimensions reflect consumers' individual situations regarding their social, emotional, motivational, etc. states.

It is important to note that it is the consumer who, along the context and time dimensions, makes up their own understanding and meaning of a brand's communications that they subsequently do or do not embrace (Finne – Grönroos, 2009). Green and Jenkins (2011: 114, 117) emphasize that in a consumer-to-consumer information flow, the context itself can modify a message's objective content and (intended) meaning: in this case the recipient not only interprets the message itself but also the (implicit or explicit) meaning attached to it by its source (referred to as "grassroots intermediary" by the authors).

One also has to note the potential negative impact of the phenomenon on marketing communications. Marketing messages (e.g. jingles, advertisements' with strong creative hooks, etc.), as products of popular consumer culture are prone to be hijacked and turned against the company by an empowered audience (Green – Jenkins, 2011). Contents originally intended as marketing messages can be hijacked by empowered consumer in many ways, ranging from ironic accompanying messages through spoof ads to memes ridiculing the brand (Table 4).

Based on its personal and relative nature, value-based emotional positioning equally involves necessarily restricted targeting, but at least well-defined target groups for each of these latter might have a notably differing interpretation of a same message (Mahajan – Wind, 2002; Kates, 2004) while messages similar in content but configured in different ways are framed differently by target groups (Yi – Baumgartner, 2009). Moreover, the mere possibility of a content being spreadable by the users repositions the meanings of mass media messages depending on the subculture a message reaches (Green – Jenkins, 2011).

Virtual communities built around specific needs and activities and the subsequent internal consistencies thus offer the possibility of a **natural segmentation** along consumer needs, habits and even lifestyles (van Dijck, 2006). Users of these communities can themselves form valuable target groups for marketers, while a marketing-focused observation can be based on the information appearing within these groups (Hagel – Armstrong, 1997).

The quality of market intelligence an organization can extract from various virtual communities largely depends on the authenticity of the information appearing within them, as well as the level, amount and direction of engagement and involvement of their members. Based on the above, one can differentiate between brand communities, built specifically around the collective consumption experience of a given brand, and various other virtual communities that are relevant to brands in other respect.

#### 4.1. Brand communities<sup>8 9</sup>

The role and meaning of brands in the lives of individuals have often been studied in the framework of given brand communities (e.g. Antorini, 2007; Kozinets, 2001, 2002a; Muñiz – O'Guinn, 2001; Schau – Muñiz, 2006). Past research shows that brands are suitable to become subjects of fandom, and communities of fans can be established around the common interest in a given brand, Brand communities, just like other communities (Cartwright – Zander, 1968) are based on shared norms, values, beliefs and behavior, even though they are "specialized, non-geographically bound [...], based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand" (Muñiz – O'Guinn, 2001: 412). Brand communities are characterized by a sense of community, that is rooted in membership legitimacy, a sense of moral responsibility towards other members (e.g. assisting new members in the right use of the brand) as well as in oppositional brand loyalty, i.e. an opposition to competing brands. Participation in brand communities focuses on acts of consumption, reflected through brand stories, anecdotes, symbols; moreover the groups possess an own, brand-specific language all of which to mark the

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<sup>8</sup> The topic is related to the wider field of branding, which do not fall within the actual topic of the present dissertation. Thus, in the framework of the present dissertation we only discuss the elements of the field of branding which are relevant for the context of the present work.

<sup>9</sup> For more on brand communities, see e.g. Antorini (2007).

group's cohesion and to create meanings around the focal brand (Antorini, 2007). Thereby one can claim that within brand communities, **brand meanings are co-created** (Schau – Muñiz, 2006). As opposed to subcultures, brand communities do not stand in opposition to mainstream culture, on the contrary, they are the concrete manifestation of the (mass) cultural phenomenon of consumption. Brand communities are equally special subcultures in the sense that beyond the focal admiration of a brand, there are very few identifiable units of shared value.

Early research on online communities already shows that a grassroots community organized around the consumption of a brand may enhance consumer engagement and loyalty (Armstrong – Hagel, 1996). Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) note that a strong brand community can contribute to socially embedding a brand by affirming consumer loyalty, commitment, and even the phenomenon of brand evangelism<sup>10</sup>. However, past research shows that relatively few brands (those referred to as lovebrands (Batra et al., 2012) or lovemarks) are fit for generating active and widespread brand communities (e.g. Apple (Schau – Muñiz, 2006), Mini (Yeh – Choi, 2011), Saab (Muñiz – O'Guinn, 2001), Lego (Antorini, 2007)). One characteristic feature of love brands is that users not only like, but often love and/or adore them, have close emotional ties with these brands, regard them as vital parts of their lives and therefore are genuinely disposed to recommend them to their acquaintances in every way possible . It is easily conceded that very few brands can succeed in becoming and staying a lovebrand among even small parts of their consumers. The latter conclusion equally leads to the main limitation of the study of the field: works on brand communities study consumer manifestations in environments where they show high levels of bonding to the focal brand.

Based on the above, the quantity of loyal, and emotionally committed, positive manifestations are likely to prevail in connection with the focal brand, and negative manifestations in connection with competing brands and communities of consumers thereof (as is the case for example with communities of fans of various sports clubs). It can further be assumed that the organization can identify a number of lead users and opinion leaders within brand communities. Lead users' main role in brand communities is to participate in education and assistance about brand use, while opinion leaders contribute to communicating the brand's message, and thus are part of the organization's

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<sup>10</sup> In the authors' words: "hyperloyalty"(Muñiz – O'Guinn, 2001: 427)

marketing communication supply chain (Törőcsik, 2007). Brand communities enable a new source of information for new potential consumers of a brand. This source of information, although still biased, is not company-generated, and goes through a filter of opinion leaders present within brand communities who equally add a personal relevance and narrative to brand and brand-related messages which makes fans a special – exemplary and exceptional (Busse – Gray, 2011) – source of audience.

Another feature of the brand communities is that they may assume various company functions, e.g. by acting as an extended and outsourced customer service and marketing communications department. For example, in connection with the Lego brand, Antorini (2007) notes that consumers (here, based on the definition provided in Chapter 3.2.1., **produsers**) not only cultivate the firm's and its products' reputation, but they equally provide them with new meanings by actively modifying and upgrading (reconstructing) them. More, consumers may set up entirely new services and solutions around the products of a brand (e.g. in the case of Lego, marketplaces founded on the selling and exchanging of particular pieces, instead of full game sets) (Antorini, 2007).

A danger of such strong communities built around a brand, but otherwise taking on a life of its own lies in a potential negative reaction to a change related to the brand (e.g. a marketing action, product launch or discontinuation). A negative reaction which is collective by definition on the level of the brand community, but also, by dint of its grassroots nature and extended social legitimacy might spill over to a wider range of consumers (Muñiz – O'Guinn, 2001).

There exist a number of special categories among brand communities for which the aforementioned customer engagement is only partially true. Brands remain a central element in these communities, however not their "love". A reason for the existence of such brand communities can be to assist a community of users of a brand in handling issues related to a given product – thus way creating a grassroots, consumer-to-consumer product support activity. Such communities are for example the message boards specializing in various brands of mobile phones (see e.g. Chapter 7.2), communities built around a media brand (e.g. tv-shows) (see e.g. 7.3.), or communities of video games. A characteristic feature of such communities is that while they can directly be related to a brand, they are rather intended to assist in the functional operation of brand. Beside a

possible lack of high emotional commitment, these communities bear the characteristics of other brand communities, i.e. the collective construction of brand meanings, taking over various corporate functions, the presence of lead users, or the brand's social embeddedness, etc.

Overall, brand communities can be said to provide a direct and well-defined social framework for the relationship and communication between a brand and its consumers. A framework, which is more casual than traditional corporate functions like customer services or marketing communications.

A drawback of brand communities for brands may be a distorted interpretation of the community by the brand and a potential reduction thereof to the level of another "official" communication channel, considering them as passive recipients of brand messages. Reality, however, is that brand communities most often are not created by brands. Instead, an already existing community with a given range of interests may become more likely to react positively to the messages of a given brand, and the brand may thus way win over the community and become its focal element (Jenkins et al., 2013).

## **4.2. Brands and brand meanings outside of brand communities**

It can be stated that a large majority of consumers are not self-conscious members of brand communities (Kates, 2004) and their relationships to brands are embedded within their daily lives and routines. Social scientists (e.g. Bennett, 1999; Kacsuk, 2005; Maffesoli, 1996) as well as marketing scientists proponents of the postmodern condition (e.g. Cova – Cova, 2002) argue that a new kind of tribalism is typical of modern societies, where looser or closer social ties are based on shared lifestyles and experiences. This latter is particularly true for communities existing in the virtual space, where it has been shown that the most important antecedent of membership and social relations is common interest (Brown et al., 2007).



Neo-tribes are communities with chosen and dynamic memberships. Because of the ever-varying expanse of and roles within tribes that can be related to the varying levels of member participation, neo-tribes can be defined as communities with a quite fuzzy framework. Thus, within one tribe and at the same time, there may be a number of active members involved in the building and maintaining of a framework and institutions for the community (e.g. organizing and promoting events for a sport) but there are also other, less active, but interested parties who may only embrace a fad or fashion that can be related to the tribe, but who still identify themselves by and through the various norms, values, beliefs and behavioral patterns related to the community. The role members in a tribe play may equally affect the extent of their ability to convey messages and meanings. Tribes' most active members (who contribute to the activity at the core of tribe on a daily basis) can be identified as opinion leaders, while other members present within the institutions of the tribe can be identified as supporters, and in a marketing perspective, as brand evangelists.

It then becomes apparent that consumer tribes equally possess ritual and customs similar to those of brand communities which define the tribe's ethos in a broad sense. One can then identify the criteria of membership along these rituals. The existence of the tribe is ensured by the aforementioned institutional framework, rituals and specific behavioral patterns, but also by gatherings and the existence of places associated with the tribe. Cova and Cova (2002) argue that the role of marketing in connection with neo-tribes is not to connect the company and the consumer but to contribute to the forging of relationships between consumers ("linking value").

Marketing's value creation within groups organized around shared experiences, lifestyle and rites can best be characterized and evaluated through its level of legitimacy (Kates, 2004; Muñoz – O'Guinn, 2001). **In this respect marketing activity is necessarily built around community participation**, as the product, service or brand it serves is positioned as a tool, a channel for members to succeed within their respective communities (e.g. through community experiences offered by the product (Schouten – McAlexander, 1995)), thus accepting that a given community of consumers gain some level of control on shaping the brand's social and cultural meanings (i.e. consumer empowerment). In this approach, brand equity is the result of a company-consumer co-creation, where in return of a certain openness from the organization's side, customers become voluntary advocates of its products or services (Urban 2004). Marketing activity can thus join a community's

everyday life through contributing to its self-determination with an ultimate goal to reach a level where the community accepts the product, brand as a legitimate information carrier of the community's own values resulting, in a long term in what can be referred to as "institutional isomorphism" (Handelman – Arnold, 1999).

Such communities, even though not related directly to brands, represent a special and well-delimited circle of consumers who can thus contribute to developing a brand's products by using them in a way adapted to their own needs, even by modifying or recycling them (user-led innovation). There can exist various communities that legitimate a brand in their rituals or ethos, while at the same time raise an issue for the brand owner by dint of their activity, or the values they represent. Examples to the above are the role of brands within gay communities studied by Kates (2004), or the consumer reinterpretation of high-end clothing line Lacoste in the beginning of the 2000's as a mass brand available even in department stores (USA) or as the flagship brand of disadvantaged suburban youth (France) (Exhibit 2).

**Exhibit 2:** Victims of their success<sup>11</sup>

According to the postmodern conception of tribal marketing, objects are provided real meanings by culture and their uses. Thus way, consumers do decide what they do with the products or services they are offered. This is how Lacoste, a brand traditionally communicating to the upper classes of society found itself as the flagship brand (or "tribal symbol") of disadvantaged French suburban youth in the beginning of the 2000's.

The sharp difference between actual and targeted users on one hand considerably dented the brand's high prestige, and on the other, made brand managers face a strategic choice: give into the pressure of consumers and follow them by assuming the changed brand position (thus generating a considerable growth of sales volume, but lowering the brands positioning), or reposition the brand and return to the image of a classy product intended for the upper classes (thus keeping a reliable and affluent consumer base, but suffering a short-term drop in sales and revenues). The brand chose a half-hearted solution of repositioning by opening to the fashion world in addition to the traditional sportswear product line (thus conveying its commitments to the upper classes), but by keeping its dynamic and young image through a rejuvenation of the brand (and thus keeping the positive elements of its former position – and with it, the interest of the young urban customer segment).

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<sup>11</sup> Published as Csordás et al. (2013: 371). Shortened version, with express authorization by the publisher.

**Legitimacy** or **authenticity** is a grassroots, consumer-generated process, which manifests itself at the highest level of the consumer value buildup, that is, by the collectivization of individual consumer brand meanings. Individualized offerings brought about by the service-dominant logic of marketing are the effect of the initial phase of consumers' search for authenticity (Fisher – Smith, 2011). A brand's legitimacy is complete on a community level when it admittedly fits the community's greater relationship and value chains (Cova – Cova, 2002), effectively contributes to building and perpetuating its ethos (Kates, 2004) and its messages are accepted by the community as socially accurate (Handelman – Arnold, 1999). According to several authors (e.g. Andsager et al., 2006; Ahn et al., 2009 in Paek et al., 2011), in these cases perceived similarity plays a greater role in the reception of a marketing message than perceived expertise. As legitimacy is a socially embedded process, in the case of a relatively large community, a brand owner may have little control over the dynamics of brand meanings and thus brand equity, which might, in extreme cases, lead to a forced repositioning or adaptation to the actual market situation. It is then imperative for brands to map their legitimacy and consumer meanings associated with them in communities. Hence the importance of examining the above mentioned effect mechanisms in marketing research. Cova and Cova (2002) note that the mapping of social spaces in marketing research is much similar to cultural ethnography (Arnould – Wallendorf, 1994). Thus, it can be assumed that the study of digital social media can be studied in a manner similar to that of cultural ethnography: with a digital or web ethnography, i.e. netnography (Kozinets, 2006). The study of these digital spaces equally poses a number of challenges for the researcher as the user's personal identity is seldom a central element in these communities (e.g. the dark web community, based on total anonymity (Gehl, 2014)), or because they lack data permanence (even though this latter is one of the web's often mentioned advantage) or searchability (e.g. communities built around chans (digital image boards and discussion channels with simple structure and rapidly rotating content), being one of the sources of internet subculture (Bernstein et al., 2011)).

### 4.3. Users' willingness to participate

The notion of willingness to participate is derived from the marketing notion of willingness to pay, with an emphasis on the growing importance of the phenomenon of consumer participation for businesses (Parent et al., 2011).

One can assume that during the reception of a communication message, the receiver equally evaluates the person of the sender (unless targeted by a close circle of friends or family). Evaluation criteria can include a sender's reliability (Greer, 2003) or their role within a group (Chatterjee, 2011). Thus, self-image and **reputation management** can pertain to the individual motives and expected rewards for the transmission of information, as well as the communication of individual personality, values, etc. towards the others (**self-presentation**).

Some researchers on electronic word-of-mouth note that the type of content also determines the willingness to share. According to Deighton and Kornfeld (2010 in Parent et al., 2011) the general **intrinsic appeal** (in the original: pass-along appeal) is equally a motivation for sharing information. Internet memes, for example, can bear such intrinsic appeal in order to be shared by users (Health et al., 2001). According to Berger and Milkman (2012) contents which are informative, mood boosting, interesting or surprising are more likely to be shared by users.

In the context of user-generated content Krishnamurthy and Dou (2008) mention two main psychological motivations, namely the (1) traditional and (2) emotional approaches of participation. The role of emotions in consumer activation has been alluded to several times in the previous chapters. Berger and Milkman (2012) also note that if a content evokes specific emotions with a low arousal (e.g. sadness) it will be less likely to be shared. These can be referred to as **deactivating** elements. In contrast, high-arousal elements, be they positive, triggering awe, or negative, triggering anger or anxiety will be more likely to be shared (cf Figure 1). This latter may be caused by the fact that sharing contributes to users' processing of the related experience (Berger – Milkman, 2012; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Lastly, Berger and Milkman (2012) equally highlight the importance of **context** in information transmission. Even if this latter is a less tangible and precise category, in a dissertation with user-generated content in its focus, we argue that the context a content appears in is no less important than the latter factors. Kozinets (1999), for example, distinguishes between various contextual factors of social interactions in virtual communities along communication goals and orientation. He distinguishes between

- recreational communications (e.g. small talk – characterized by communication for primarily selfish reasons and communication being the primary – or only – objective),
- relational communications (characterized by social orientation, a communication goal, community building through shared values),
- informational communications (characterized by instrumental use, based on individual goals for the accomplishment of other ends), and
- transformational communications (characterized by long-term engagement for attaining an objective focused on longer-term social gain).

Another contextual factor is the accessibility of information, i.e. the level of noise or whether it requires a lower or higher individual investment to access a piece of information.

It is important to note in connection with the diffusion and dissemination of information that all users need not to be proactive participants of the digital space. The technological and other (i.e. financial, time, etc.) barriers to active communications act as a **filter** in digital communications and help in disseminating valuable content at the expense of communication **noise** caused by mass presence on the various digital channels (Horowitz, 2006).

Signs of reliability can help in deciding whether to share a piece of information in a social context, and can thus function as social filters (Greer, 2003), just like the perceived credibility of a potential information source, i.e. as an **opinion leader** (Ellison – Fudenberg, 1995) or **market maven** (Feick – Price, 1987).

Ha and McCann (2008) distinguish between three major dimension in connection with information (advertising) clutter.

- The first category contains the structural elements of communications. According to this latter, the more content audiences are exposed to, the less they will remember them, or will be able to differentiate between them (and between useful and useless content). The physical perception of information is equally affected by its perceived intrusiveness and competitiveness (i.e. the degree of similarity of a piece of information with the other surrounding pieces of information).
- The functional approach puts the satisfaction of consumer need in its focus. According to this approach, the evaluation of information depends on the reason of users for consuming the media. If a piece of information meets a specific consumer need (e.g. provides useful information to solving a problem, is entertaining, etc.) , it will be perceived as useful, regardless of whether it is a piece of advertising or organic content.
- The information processing approach puts information overload into its focus. In an information context, selective perception will most likely appear in a situation where a consumer might perceive a content as intrusive (e.g. advertising breaks in television).

The context of a message therefore is an important factor in the quality of information reception. It is primordial for marketers to place messages in contexts and channels and ways where consumers are less prone to ad avoidance, and where consumers can perceive a sponsored message as valuable content.

#### 4.4. Advertising as media content<sup>12</sup>

In the closing part of our literature review, it is noteworthy to recall the example of the "best job in the world", mentioned in Exhibit 1. Exhibit 1 reads as follows: " users could relate to [user-generated content during the campaign], without necessarily knowing anything about Queensland or the campaign, or even without ever having the chance to travel there, etc. This audience can be referred to as scattering loss in traditional advertising [...]. Here however, this perception couldn't be farther from the truth. Users here were reached with the campaign's message as a bonus [...] to the entertaining content that they willingly searched for and consumed."

Social media as a new platform serves as a new element in the media mix of organizations to reach its traditional target audiences, actual and potential consumers of its products or services. The personal nature and possibilities of personalization of social media naturally plays a role in reaching priority consumers, that is, acts as a new and upgraded channel of the organization's consumer relationship management [CRM] activity, without changing the organization's customer management activity in its core.

However, one must equally note that social media – by dint of consumers technological empowerment (Krishnamurthy – Kucuk, 2009) – is more than a simple new communication channel for organizations. Researchers of stakeholder theory argue that there exist a number of outside interest groups that wish to play a role in shaping the organization (Gregory, 2007). In this new market situation a new stakeholder appears that the firm needs to consider: that of the non-consumer opinion leader manifesting themselves about the company. While these users do not generate direct value to the organization, they follow the organization's communications and reflect to it within their circles or to a mass audience, thus entering the scene of the organization's stakeholders (Table 8).

This new stakeholder role is all the more important that while traditional consumers are in a sort of a contact of interest with the company (assigning them the role of actual or potential "consumer"), or more, following a purchase an implicit contractual relationship

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<sup>12</sup> Published as Csordás (2012) and Csordás – Nyirő (2013). Used under authorization by the publisher and the co-author.

ensues, with subsequent rights and obligations. A third party (i.e. user – see chapter 3.2.2) manifesting themselves in connection with the organization are under no so constraint. Similarly, the person and interests of the sender of a piece of information are not always identifiable. Company-related information appearing on freely accessible channels is by definition in the public domain, and consumers themselves can decide whether they agree with and follow information received thus way (see e.g. antibranding).

**Table 8. The organization in social media: The audience as a consumer and as a social factor**

		<b>Social value</b> <i>(as content producer)</i>		} <i>dynamic</i>
		<b>short-tail</b> <i>(opinion leader)</i>	<b>long-tail</b> <i>("normal" media consumer, few feedbacks)</i>	
<b>Business value</b> <i>(as consumer)</i>	<b>short-tail</b> <i>(important account; CRM)</i>	<b>business as usual</b> <i>(important account)</i>	<b>business as usual</b> <i>(important account)</i>	
	<b>long-tail</b> <i>(consumer mass)</i>	<b>new area</b> <i>(consumer mass → important account [?])</i>	<b>business as usual</b>	
	<b>none</b> <i>(non-consumer)</i>	<b>new area</b> <i>(no contact → important account [?])</i>	<b>no contact</b>	
		} <i>more or less static</i>		

Source: Own elaboration

While important customers that bear a high business value – be they involved or not in the firm's (social) media activity – remain important accounts (i.e. in the short tail of a company's income curve), opinion leaders so far uninvolved in the given firm's activities might become important for taking part in online conversations concerning the firm. All this because their brand-specific messages may enter the information stream about the brand and thus can affect brand performance. The manner this new category of users resort to this newly-won power equally depends on the firm's behavior. It is obvious that these user come into the fore for the company in connection with a potentially negative event. A well-established communication strategy and behavior in social media might relativize a potentially negative brand performance in electronic word-of-mouth, and the firm might even use it directly in its communications in a manner to counter negative third-party information. However, a neglected social communication might entail that



negative third-party information enter the stream of information reaching actual consumers.

Parent et al. (2011) note that the willingness to participate of consumers is an important novel tool for increasing business value. The philosophy of content marketing mentioned beforehand corroborates this point of view<sup>13</sup>. As the two target groups only partially intersect, the firm needs to emphasize on handling the needs of both. As a result of this doubled audience, content production and dissemination steps forward as a focal element of marketing and brand strategies besides community and relationship management, making firms become media content providers of a sort (Pulizzi, 2012). Just like traditional media having two-sided markets (Gálik – Urbán, 2014) (i.e. the media industry sells a joint product to two different categories of buyers: the medium itself to advertisers, and the medium content to media consumers), firms' marketing communications activity, and social media activity in particular, might develop a similar type of two-sided market structure. In this latter case, organizations present and communicating in (social) media will be operating in two different environments, thereby becoming media content providers. Its “**marketing (target) audience** made up by the consumers of the firm's products or services remains of primary importance. At the same time, an extended, secondary audience, that we can refer to as the brand's **media audience** is likely to follow the various channels of the firm for the sake of the there available contents. Thus, the organization enters a totally new and in some ways, full-fledged market, that of content broadcasting, simply by being present and participating in the social media arena. In this respect content marketing goes beyond the mere field of marketing and becomes itself a cultural phenomenon.

As it has been mentioned beforehand in the dissertation, the fundamentally social nature of new media entails that brand mentions appear embedded in given user contexts (e.g.

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<sup>13</sup> It needs to be highlighted that the author of the present dissertation does not make a value judgment on whether organizations should (or not) become professional media content providers in / beside / instead of their marketing communications activity. The same way, the present dissertation aims not to foretell whether content marketing is a current fad in marketing or a sustainable novel element of the marketing toolbox. Therefore the present chapter is only intended to present the current context of marketing communications and the related marketing dilemma that organizations are facing.

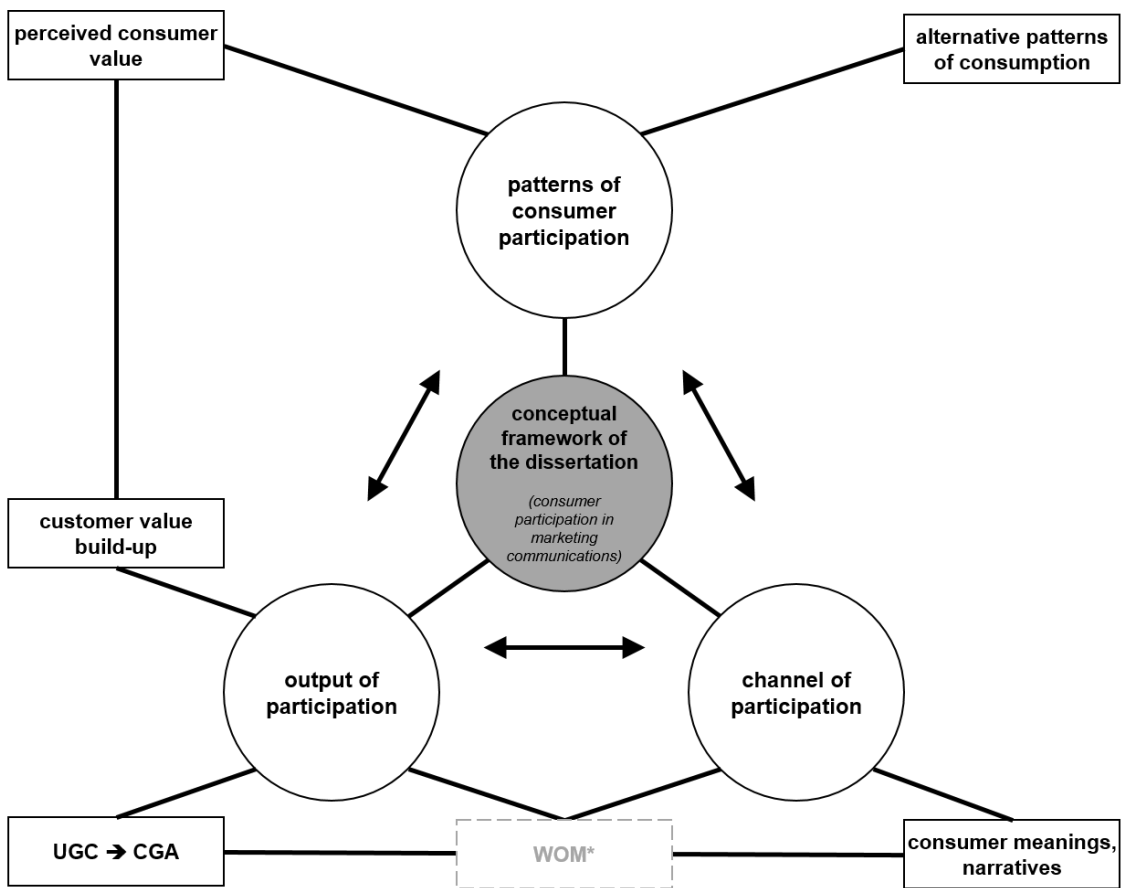
in brand communities, outside of brand communities, during personal discussions, etc.). These contexts alone are not sufficient to decide (unless expressly mentioned) whether the active user, sender of a piece of information is an actual consumer of a given brand. They will however be likely consumers of the channel they employ to send their message. The notion of user therefore can therefore be applied in the broadest sense to the consumers of a given new medium.

As in the research of consumer behavior it is important to distinguish between consumer and customer behavior (Szűcs, 2011), in the research of consumer participation it is also important to acknowledge whether a pool of brand-related manifestation would originate from mostly marketing audiences, i.e. consumers of the brand (e.g. in the case of brand communities, or in the framework of a company-generated crowdsourcing platform, etc.), or from mostly media audiences, i.e. content consumers. Thus way, the notion of scattering loss becomes overly relative, while both audience types can become valuable sources of information and market intelligence for the company, in the spirit of divergent thinking (Mitev – Horváth, 2008). At the same time consumer manifestations need to be interpreted on different levels for each target group. Based on the framework of consumer participation (Figure 6), one can conclude that spaces that mostly encompass actual product users will more likely contribute to actual corporate performance, while content consumers (i.e. those audiences that will come in contact with a marketing communications message in an entertainment goal) will more likely contribute to corporate performance in an indirect manner, through communications and collective meaning making. This indirect contribution is at the focus of the present dissertations' main empirical study.

## 5. SUMMARY: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE DISSERTATION

Figure 7 illustrates the conceptual framework of the dissertation based on our literature review. In the study of the effects of consumer participation on marketing communications we set as a main goal the business-oriented analysis of participation. Based on the literature review, we argue that this latter can be carried out primarily through the study of the creation and continuous re-creation of consumer value. A concrete manifestation thereof is the marketing communications effect of user-generated contents, i.e. the category of consumer-generated advertising in a broad sense. Electronic word-of-mouth is simultaneously an effect and channel of consumer participation (even though it is not part of the narrower framework of the present dissertation). It is an effect of consumer participation as communication on the internet is carried out in a primarily textual, but in any case, digital, and more or less permanent (i.e. remaining in the digital cloud) manner. It is a channel, as it contributes to transmitting consumer meanings and enables participation itself. Equally, as is the case with the related fields (e.g. in the study of brand communities) it is primordial to map the triggers of consumer participation in studying participation itself. Based on our literatures review, we see social motivations, alternative consumption patterns (resulting from the phenomenon of consumer empowerment) and the perception of added consumer value as the highlighted factors for the following empirical study.

Figure 7. Conceptual framework of the dissertation



Source: Own elaboration

## PART II. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

### 6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 6.1. Aim of the research

Based on the literature review, one can state that the new marketing logic (Vargo – Lusch, 2004) puts the consumer into the center of an organization's marketing activity. Finne and Grönroos (2009) or Andreasen (1995) note however that the communication function has so far received less attention in marketing research than necessary.

Parallel to this, the presented evolution of the definition of marketing highlights the fact the field of marketing is currently undergoing an important paradigm shift (Finne – Grönroos, 2009; Grönroos, 2006; Merz et al., 2009; Vargo – Lusch, 2004). The same way, it seems that marketing communications and marketing research are equally on the verge of a strategic inflection point (Bakken, 2010). As is the case with all situation of market turbulence, the organizations involved (e.g. media, advertising agencies, advertisers) are struggling to clearly understand their roles in a changing environment when traditional, top-down, targeted (marketing) communications messages coexist with a complex system and network of partially connected pieces of information and content found in social and digital media (Green – Jenkins, 2011), which are often grassroots initiatives, ideas, with highly questionable virality and controllability (Berger – Milkman, 2012).

Thus way, the aim of the present dissertation is to holistically examine a new marketing communications space through the spectacles of integrated marketing communications (see e.g. Bernschütz, 2012) or 360 degree communications. The study focuses on the **communication space** itself between the consumer and the company, and the **touchpoints** between the two parties. The dissertation's research questions are formulated along this approach.

The main focus of the dissertation is thus to explore the opportunities for firms' marketing communications lying in user-generated media and the diffusion thereof.

**The dissertations' scientific goal is to contribute to the literature on consumer empowerment and online information diffusion by offering marketing-focused insights to them.** Another scientific goal is to examine the concept of consumer value creation as a focal point in the framework of an empirical study thus offering a contribution to the framing of the concept and to the understanding of the underlying working mechanisms, while providing a starting point for further research on the marketing communication impact of consumer value.

As a managerial implication, the dissertation aims is to assist corporate decision-making by reducing uncertainties related to the field, by helping to bring the dynamics of the analyzed communication space and there applicable marketing activities closer (Bakken, 2010).

## **6.2. Research questions**

Our main empirical research is part of a work package of the Cre8tv.eu research project supported by a grant of the 7th Framework Programme (FP7) of the European Commission entitled "Consumers & Digital Media: Patterns of Participation in Production & Sharing". Within this work package, our research is aimed at mapping the marketing communications opportunities of consumer-generated content. We wish to contribute to this research direction by answering the following research questions.

- **RQ1: How user-generated contents as cultural goods contribute to creating tangible marketing communication value?**

The definition of value and its operationalization to the field of marketing communications unveiled the fact that value is a subjective term based on individual perceptions, that can become part of the norms of various social groups through a process of legitimation. It was equally demonstrated that in the new communication environment marketing communications more or less inevitably become an activity of media content creation and management where they come into contact with new stakeholders and media audiences. These new stakeholders, beside being consumers of an organization's products and services and/or marketing communications messages, can be motivated to participate in the organization's activities in a process of co-creation.

The main research question of the dissertation aims to examine in what ways various user-generated contents may become relevant marketing communication content for firms, and to examine how a firm can motivate its audiences to disseminated messages that contain (among others) brand-relevant messages. The following research question equally contribute to answering this main research question.

- **RQ2: What types of latent corporate and brand connections (i.e. consumer meanings) can be identified through user manifestation?**

The study of social media is suitable for unveiling new, unexplored brand connection and to analyzing competing market segments and products. By studying user-generated manifestations, the social media arena can be seen as "a crystal ball" for forecasting future consumption trends (Casteleyn et al., 2009). While meaning appropriation of brand messages in the digital world is an actual threat that marketers can hardly tackle, brand echoes in virtual communities, for instance, can help diagnose brand perception problems which can trigger measures from the organization to challenge and counteract alternative portrayals or hijacking (Fisher – Smith, 2011). Analyzing in what ways brands are present in online consumer talks is an important resource for companies to track authentic brand meanings.

- **RQ3: How does the organization get into the spotlight during peer-to-peer interactions? How can a company derive market intelligence from users expressing or suggesting their needs in connection with a particular activity?**

It was demonstrated that a large majority of consumers are not self-conscious members of brand communities (Kates, 2004) and their relationships to brands are embedded within their daily lives and routines.

The lack of information literacy (Rab, 2011) as a social phenomenon calls for the study of the sources of information present of various channels and that of the credibility thereof. Thus, another element of the above research question is the study of the dimensions of the perceived authenticity of a content on these channels, and that of the patterns a community legitimates the available sources of information (see e.g. Weiss et al., 2008). An indirect outcome of this inquiry may be to identify how can an organization transmit information that is perceived as authentic outside of the organization's paid or owned channels.

- **RQ4: What types of value-added levels of consumer contribution can be identified? How can each level be characterized, and what touchpoints can be identified between them?**

The value buildup model (Figure 4) indicates that consumer experiences and meanings constitute the highest levels of consumer value generation. Thus a high consumer value is likely to be characterized by a high level of consumer involvement (leading to lovebrands). This highest levels of consumer value generation constitute the focus of studies of brand communities. There is however little empirical evidence on low-involvement, and/or on more critical, skeptical consumer communities and corporate effects thereof. The categorization of value-added levels of consumer contribution aims to fill this research gap.



- **RQ5: How do delighters and dissatisfiers of value work in these cultural entities? How can a company enhance perceived customer value using these channels and contents?**

Emotions were shown to largely influence the process of consumer value creation. The analysis of highly emotional consumer manifestations can help the mapping, categorization and further analysis of factors that can thus way influence the consumers' image on the organization's activity. Answers provided to this research question will then be able to serve as a basis to studies on brand loyalty, on the working mechanisms of lovebrands, or on consumer motivations of antibranding.

- **RQ6: How are less active members socialized within a community?**

Both sender and recipient, i.e. consumer are present in the context of the present research via various digital consumer manifestations. The fact that the digital space only allows for the analysis of express reactions (e.g. user comment, fan membership, etc.) bring about the research limitation of leaving "mute" users outside of the scope of the research (Prior – Miller, 2012; van Dijck – Nieborg, 2009). In the present research context we believe that this limitation is manageable in the respect that traditional marketing communication theory already builds upon the so-called two-step flow model of communication, which postulates that most people form their opinions under the influence of opinion leaders, who in turn are influenced by the mass media. Moreover, based on our literature review (see Chapter 2.4.2) and preliminary studies (see Chapters 3.4.1, 3.4.2), it can be argued that not all form of participation are equal (Horowitz, 2006), and the passive mass audience (van Dijck – Nieborg, 2009) (similarly to mass media) is influenced by the contents published by the active few. It then becomes an interesting point of analysis whether a need for engaging additional users or consumers to participate in discussion and the flow of information is raised by organizations or by the participating members themselves. The importance of user activation indicated for example in the fact that recommendations for social media managers and practitioners about user activation regularly appear in professional press (see e.g. Lee, 2010; Quinn, 2011).

### 6.3. Research methodology

The dissertation studies a paradigm shift in marketing communications in the process. The experimental, exploratory methodology chosen for the empirical study of the dissertation is a reflection of this changing environment, through which we aim to gain insights into a turbulent environment, and thereby offer theoretical and empirical handholds and foundations for future research.

As seen in the literature review, the marketing (communications) focused analysis of digital/social channels appears to be justified along two main dimensions, namely the marketing outcomes of relationships and content (cf. relationship marketing and content marketing). The online mass communication environment in its current state of development is still mainly hypertextual (Hoffman et al., 1995), therefore it can be argued that the pieces of user-generated content will serve as a logical unit of analysis for both research directions. The chosen methodology of netnography, and qualitative content analysis within, provides an adequate framework in the study of these units of analysis.

The main aim of a qualitative study in the fields (netnography, content analysis) is to analyze a changing environment, to explore new consumption patterns in order to offer relevant research questions for further studies. In this respect our study is highly exploratory and has many connection with the method of grounded theory (Kozinets, 2006). Mitev (2012: 27) notes that a frequent misinterpretation of grounded theory is that a such study does not require a prior knowledge on past research and literature in the topic, neither does it necessitate the formulation of research questions. While not aligning with any particular existing stream of theory, in the present dissertation's literature review a special effort was made to offer a sufficiently wide framework for the topic. While Thereby we aimed to familiarize the reader with the various touchpoints of an emerging area of scientific research (Mitev, 2012). Our research question detailed above equally offer – along the scientific objectives mentioned beforehand – a direction to a research in an emerging field, without, at the same time, the aim of quantifying unveiled logical relationships or testing statistical hypotheses. This is equally the reason for not

formulating specific assumptions in connection to our results during the operationalization of our research questions.

A limit of our research is that even with a most careful research design, our study cannot be representative along any main main segmentation criteria. Based on the de-commodification of goods and the service-dominant logic of marketing, services "possess neither entirely unique nor mutually common properties", making research in the field filled with "perilous obstacles" in the field of marketing research and academic research as a whole built upon generality (Shugan, 2004: 25). Gathering market intelligence in the field equally required a consumer-centered, holistic data collection and analysis methodology, enabled by the corporate function and approach of content management (Forsyth, 2004). For this reason other researchers (Branthwaite – Patterson, 2011; Smith, 2009) refer to the current environment as a "listening economy".

As mentioned in earlier parts of this dissertation, the study of brand communities is hindered by the fact that a large majority of consumers are not self-conscious members of brand communities (Kates, 2004), and even if they are, their manifestations about the focal brand are likely to be positively biased, as the very purpose of these communities is to regroup engaged, loyal consumers of a brand (Kates, 2004). Therefore, instead of brand communities, conducting research along specific life situations (e.g. hobbies) or other types of communities (e.g. neo-tribes (Bennett, 1999; Kacsuk, 2005; Maffesoli, 1996)) enables the researcher to capture brand meanings embedded in users' everyday lives and during the manifestation of various other, wider (e.g. social, societal) needs (Cova – Cova, 2002; Kates, 2004).

The study of social spaces is justified by the approach according to which brands, organizations, and researchers as well need to follow consumers to channels where they are most reachable. Such digital social spaces are for example message boards (see e.g. Kozinets, 2002b), blogs (see e.g. Kozinets et al., 2010), content-sharing sites (see e.g. Pace, 2008) or social networking sites (Casteleyn et al., 2009).

The analysis of social media is equally justified by the realization that the development of the new dominant logic of marketing can be viewed in time in parallel with that of new

social media platforms. New media being the predominant scene of consumer empowerment as a mass phenomenon (Kucuk – Krishnamurthy, 2007) can equally be argued to be an enabler of changing consumer culture: social media became factors of business performance through an increased presence in consumer discussions resulting in additional brand awareness but also mass evaluation by consumers.

Our research questions are adapted to the chosen methodology of netnography. The **relevance of the methodology** is detailed in the following.

The rapid spread of the internet as a social space raised the idea among various researchers of extending ethnographic research to the digital space. The methodology of online ethnography is discussed by a number of authors under various names such as cyberethnography (Sayre, 2001), webnography (Puri, 2007), webethnography (Prior – Miller, 2012), or netnography (Kozinets, 1998). It seems that the this former designation and related methodology has prevailed in the past 15 years as a digital alternative to traditional ethnography.

Netnography, as developed by Robert V. Kozinets, is a research philosophy regrouping general research principles for social sciences in the study of digital environments (Kozinets, 2006). Langer and Beckman (2005) recommend content analysis as the primary method of data collection and analysis for the study of sensitive research topics. At the same time, Kozinets (2006) notes that the methodology of netnography is not tied to any one specific method (the same way as "ethnographers are inevitably bricoleurs" (Kozinets, 2006: 132)), and he rather focuses on setting the general principles of the approach. According to Kozinets (2006) the possible methods used in netnographic studies can be as diverse as content analysis, projective techniques, narrative analysis, semiotic analysis (the study of signs and their meanings, e.g. the language and abbreviations used within brand communities (Antorini, 2007)), various visual research methods (e.g. visual content analysis (Schau – Muñiz, 2006), semiotic studies (Kucuk, 2014)), interviews and queries of online users, kinesic studies (e.g. eye tracking studies). He also states that it is preferable to incorporate of several methods of research and triangulate the result thereof for the best interpretation of the answers to a research question (see also: Arnould – Wallendorf, 1994).

Kozinets (2002b) describes netnography as a 4+1 step procedure: (1) cultural entrée, (2) gathering and analyzing data, (3) reliable interpretation, (4) conducting ethical research, and (5) feedback.

- The cultural entrée phase of the research serves to formulate the initial research questions, to identify the initial pool of online forums that will next be studied, to choose which research methods will be employed and to establish the extent to which the researcher will participate in the online community. The research questions for the present dissertation are detailed in the previous chapter, the research methodology and sampling are presented in the current and next chapters. The initial pool of online forums to examine in the present study was determined based on our previous research (see Chapter 7). During the selection of the online forums to analyze, we deemed it important that the focal product category be relevant for a such study, i.e. that it have a communication value to reflect consumer participation, go beyond the arena of brand communities (see Chapters 4.1 vs 4.2), yet be characterized by a distinct activity to allow a subsequent sampling process. In our preliminary research mobile phones and televisual contents turned out to be such product categories (see Chapters 7.2 and 7.3). The pool of online forums, social media channels<sup>14</sup> to analyze is an equally important question. In our prior research, we studied blog comment and message board discussions. At the same time, there has been a growing research interest in social network structures (e.g. Casteleyn et al., 2009) and non-textual contents (e.g. video-sharing sites (e.g. Pace, 2008)), including internet memes (e.g. Health et al., 2001) often present on a diverse set of channels and taking the form of visual contents
- Data collection is directed at capturing three different types of data (Kozinets, 2006). The first is the research database itself. The research database is a structured recording at a specific moment of time of the computer-mediated communications of online community members, following the conditions specified in the description of the research methodology. Second is the observations the researcher makes about the various social interactions, behavior of individual users, etc. The recording of these research notes can be continuous

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<sup>14</sup> On the various types of social media see e.g. Csordás et al. (2014)

(made "in vivo" during the observation of the various online communications, before the data recording itself) or static (observations made during the analysis of the recorded sample). In case a participant netnographies, a third possible type of data that can be recorded is additional interviews made with members of online communities.

- A reliable interpretation assures the overall reliability of a netnographic study. For doing so, Kozinets (2006: 134) recommends the following considerations: immersion, internalization, awareness of alterity and engagement. Even though a qualitative study is not equipped to be representative, the validity and the richness and depth of the research can be ensured by its methodical design as well as by a triangulation of results from various sub-methodologies, by "helping to distinguish typical consumer manifestations from the extreme" (Dörnyei – Mitev, 2010: 64). Based on our previous research, a reliable interpretation is largely helped by a pursuit of theoretical saturation (Sandelowski, 2008) during sample collection, i.e. that the researcher – if enabled – continue data collection until redundancy is encountered in the information flow. Even though qualitative studies do not aim for a broad sample size, it is still unavoidable to work with a sufficiently large sample for the researcher to be able to provide relevant market intelligence along the research questions.
- There are equally a number of ethical elements to be considered when conducting a netnography. In a such study, one needs to consider whether they analyze a private or a public site, what constitutes informed consent on computer-mediated channels and how future traceability would affect a user's privacy. While Langer and Beckman (2005) suggest the methodology of content analysis for sensitive research topics, indicating the source for verbatim quotes can also be problematic, an is thus an element of consideration. In a study by Kozinets et al. (2010) for example, the above considerations (i.e. to hinder future traceability) led to the changing of names of both the focal product and the analyzed bloggers, while other studies did not resort to similar distortion of data. The participant status of the researcher and the revelation thereof to community members are another element of consideration in the studied online communities. This latter is as much a question of ethics as one of methodology, as the researcher must evaluate whether being identifiable to other community members would or not hinder the results of their study. In the case of the present empirical research, all elements of

the sample are publicly accessible online. Following the argument by Langer and Beckman (2005), such user-generated manifestations are similar to sending a letter to publishers in traditional media. In social media however, one must not lose sight of the fact that a user manifestation can willingly and/or unwillingly contain sensible (e.g. private) data, whether or not it is publicly available, which would make it possible to directly identify a given user, even when behind an alias or avatar (Nagy, 2014). This dilemma can be referred to as the "public intimacy" (Pace, 2008) of digital spaces. In these cases the researcher is required to assure the anonymity of the "participant".

- In case of sensitive topics and in case the researcher "revealed themselves" and the purpose of their research to the community, they need to offer the members a possibility to feedback, and, in case of highly sensitive contents (e.g. direct quotes), the possibility to "veto". Feedback can equally be used as a data source for additional information and impressions for the research, and overall contributes to the ethics of a research.

Following Langer and Beckman's (2005) recommendation, we believe that a **qualitative content analysis** as a concrete methodology is the best suited for our answering the above research questions.

Our **sample** is based on posts and pages of message boards, blogs and social networking sites. The peculiarities of the chosen methodology bring about the fact that the **observation unit** in our research is not provided by individual respondents, rather by units of content (i.e. consumer manifestations on online spaces, available at a given moment of time). These online user manifestations compose a narrative unit, whereby our research can be linked to the methodology of consumer **narrative analysis**.

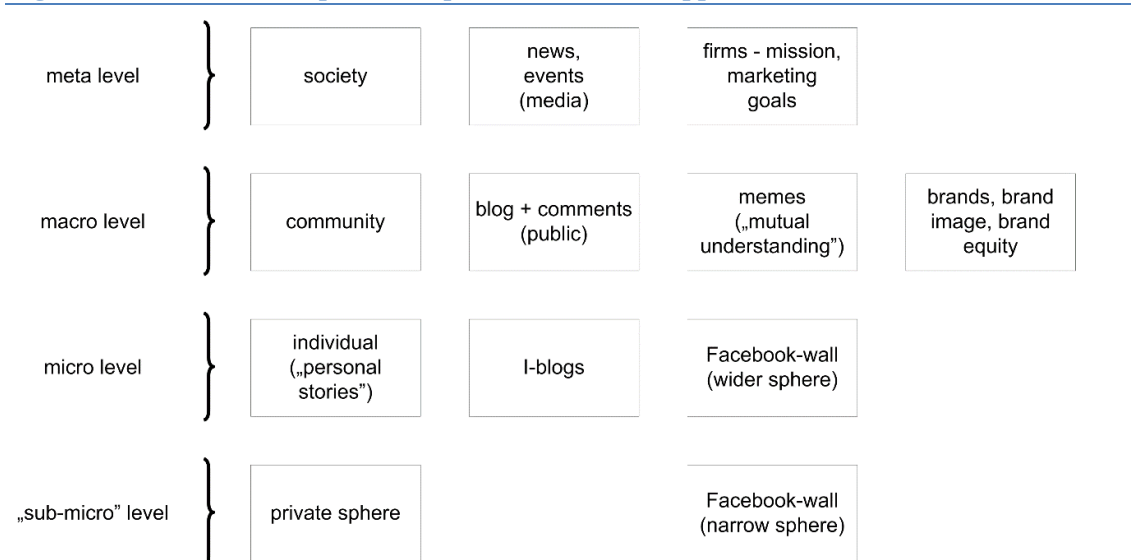
According to Kozinets (2006: 139) in consumers' stories brands are related to history, location, social distinction, personal involvement, emotion, authenticity and (e.g. in the case of brand communities) religious devotion. Parallel to this, discussion and stories on these channels form "a composite model of how the world is, how people perceive the world, and how people narrate these perceptions to others" (Gordon – Swanson, 2009: 1), offering a more complex and in-depth evidence about the perceptions of realities. This in-depth information gives ground to conducting an interpretive analysis, adding to the

holistic analysis of a socially, culturally, and – in the present case – commercially embedded behavioral patterns (Hopkinson – Hogg, 2006). The presentation of an interpretive analysis by the researcher is a decontextualization of individual stories (Kovács, 2007: 390), an extrapolation, and overall a process of storymaking and -telling (Hopkinson – Hogg, 2006: 158).

As Hopkinson and Hogg (2006: 165-166) note, the standards of quality are still lacking for qualitative research. According to Maxwell (1996) a qualitative study can equally be evaluated on the grounds of validity, even though (contrary to quantitative studies) there exist no pre-established, reference indexes for doing so, leaving validity to be an overall goal of qualitative research. Content validity and **reliability** in the present research are ensured by the soundness of the analysis, its coherence and critical approach (Hogg – Maclaran, 2008), as well as by the in-depth presentation of the study context and accurate quotes and illustration (i.e. credibility). Moreover, the detailed presentation of our research methodology, process and principles of analysis are aimed to ensure the repeatability and transferability of our analysis.

Following the indication by Kozinets (2006) on triangulation, the following figure gives a summary of the levels of communication levels and spaces identified throughout our previous research work, as well as the related possibilities for scientific investigation.

**Figure 8. Communication spaces and qualitative research opportunities in new media**



Source: Own elaboration



Ethical research being a separate stance in the methodology of netnography as defined by Kozinets (2006), the "sub-micro" level cannot form a focus of a study. While the sub-micro level is possibly particularly important in the process of information diffusion and electronic word-of-mouth, there is hardly any ethical way for the researcher to access and study private one-to-one online discussion directly. Indirect (e.g. self-reported) traces are available on the higher levels of publicity (e.g. consumer narratives) to make side observations on this level. On a micro level, the individual behind a piece of content can be studied, through various personal stories and narratives. On a macro level, interaction between members can be put into the focus of a study, as well as the cultural "products" thereof (e.g. internet memes). On the broadest (meta) level of publicity, echoes of socially embedded activities can be studied (e.g. media appearances, effects of an organizations' communications efforts, etc.).

In both our preliminary research and main empirical research we resorted to a **directed, arbitrary sampling** method by putting contents posted on online message boards, blogs and social media pages into the focus. Directed sampling is a non-probability sampling technique which can be effective in the case of a focused research framework (e.g. a narrow cultural area) where the role and potential contribution of informants is more important for answering the research question than the representativity of the study (Lincoln – Guba, 1985, Wallendorf – Belk, 1989 in Kozinets, 2002). In the present case, directed sampling was justified by the philosophy that the research questions need to determine the research methodology to be used. In this respect, directed sampling can be closely matched with the philosophy of netnography (Kozinets, 2002b: 67).

It is also important for studies that employ directed sampling to be **reproducible** and that their results be **transferable** for further research topic in order to produce, at some point and by the use of further research methodologies, a generalizable result (Hones, 1990). In order to make that possible, the research methodology has to be carefully planned, executed and documented (see chapter 7.2).

The selected methodology is an unobtrusive, **observational netnography**. In this case, the researcher is an "outsider, who does not participate in the activity of the online community" (Dörnyei – Mitev, 2010: 59). By the lack of direct interactions, the researcher can gather less information from given community members, and the individual depth of the study is likely to be affected. At the same time, as Hopkinson and Hogg (2006) note that narratives and as much a channel as a content. As such, the there available information is less likely to be biased (e.g. the issues related to socially expected responses in data gathered through questionnaire survey), as it is the result of an actual behavior. Moreover, one can argue that the analysis of consumer manifestations as sample units is justified as users (by not having a time constraint otherwise present in research inquiries) spend exactly the amount of time to write or produce a content they deem necessary, thus adding another type of depth to a research based on these contents. Thus, in our opinion, our research being unobtrusive does not hinder the depth required to answer the research questions, which moreover focus on a holistic approach to the field. As stated beforehand, results of consumer motivations as the expression of perceived meanings are to be investigated through active and subjective manifestations (texts, creative works, etc.).

Furthermore, an unobtrusive qualitative study offer an easier access to a sample for the researcher as it is highly cost-effective, demands less compromise and thus provides the researcher with more freedom to conduct their research in the sole goal to best answer their research question.

Therefore, data analysis in the present dissertation is exclusively built on secondary data sources. Nevertheless, research notes as primary data sources might be required during the phase of initial observation even in a such study. These research notes can include elements such as the unstructured observation of the targeted sample, where remarkable events or comments can and need to be recorded in connection with the research questions.

Data processing is based on a cleaned and structured form of a database composed of the recorded sample elements at a determined moment of time. A such database in the present context may include posts and contents of blogs, message boards and other virtual apparitions (e.g. search engine results), and, if necessary, user comments related to these contents, and, in the case of audiovisual contents (e.g. internet memes), an exact location

(i.e. internet hyperlink) to secure future retrievability. Furthermore, the database needs to include additional elements such as the date of recording, relevant additional information<sup>15</sup> and research notes.

The database then allows for the making of basic (so-called quasi-)statistics, such as the average number of comments for one post, which expresses the interest generated by a post, etc. These quasi-statistics can, according to Maxwell (1996: 95) provide the qualitative study with an element of **validity**.

In a qualitative analysis, the entire text corpus needs to be examined, in its context. In addition, the qualitative methodology is flexible enough to provide a framework of analysis for issues and interesting elements emerging during analysis, the coding system is open and iterative, i.e. adjustable during the various phases of data analysis (Babbie, 2003). As information diffusion itself does not reflect a static state, new meanings and contexts may arise after the analysis of certain codes, or code groups which may then trigger a need to modify the coding system en route. The iterative nature of content analysis is suitable for such modification. All in all, the iterative and holistic nature are primordial elements of qualitative content analysis (Babbie, 2003).

The rigorous operationalization of the study's research questions provides a suitable framework for data analysis and the building of relevant intelligence, while the qualitative nature of the study provides an open enough research environment to include previously overlooked factors, even in a potentially advanced stage of analysis.

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<sup>15</sup> E.g. in the case of blog and message board posts in our preliminary studies: the date of publication, audience statistics (if available), number of fans/likes (if available), and additional data related to comments (e.g. author [if available], date of publication [time elapsed between a post and a comment], etc.).

## 7. PRELIMINARY STUDIES

In the following chapter we present the results of the main preliminary studies conducted with the participation of the author<sup>16</sup>. Results are presented in a summary form, along elements relevant for the sake and topic of the present dissertation. In certain cases we supplement the results of the presented research with further references to the literature, with the aim of offering a best fit to the general topic and main empirical research phase of the present dissertation. In every case, added elements are provided with additional references.

### 7.1. Degree, relevance and authenticity of online participation

In a study of the diffusion of gossip in popular general-interest online consumer blogs and message boards, Horváth et al. (2010) identify various consumer roles in connection with the level of consumer (here: commenter) contribution. Based on the study of the research sample (n=62,000 comments), the more a response is deemed relevant by the community, the higher their perceived level expertise is. The research showed that users who provided responses, information and solution most perceived as relevant and useful to a prior message or inquiry were those who were the most involved (categorized as "affected" and/or "experts") in the given topic. The same message or inquiry rather triggered wanton exhibitionism from others (dubbed "exhibitionists"), while others considered these as a basis for discussion (dubbed "debaters").

Thematic message boards present in the sample suggested that there active users (commenters) do expect a certain degree of professionalism from other participants, while those not meeting this criterion are ostracized by the community and moderated. The phenomenon of hijacking (dubbed: "off-topic") appeared on more popular and general-

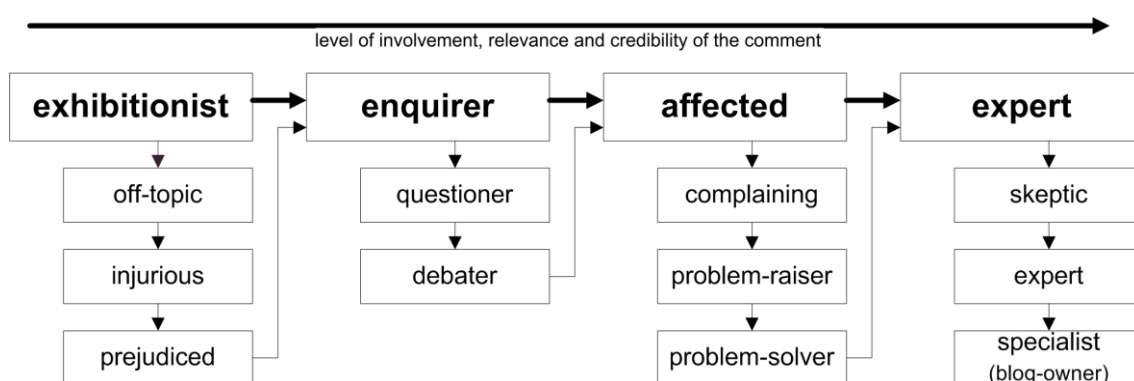
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<sup>16</sup> Contents of the cited sources are published with express written permission of the co-authors. Excerpts taken from the cited works are the result of the author's own work.

interest, although complaint-driven channels (e.g. a popular Hungarian consumer protection blog), e.g. by starting a private conversation on the public channel or by constantly fussing about trifles and highlighting contradictions ("skeptic").

The above research confirms the view expressed by Van Dijck and Nieborg (2009) as well as Horowitz (2006) according to which not all forms of participation are equal, and certain user-generated contents (here: user comments) can be deemed useful (e.g. by answering a specific question or issue raised by another users or by a justified questioning of the truth of a piece of information), while others especially counterproductive (e.g. hijacking a discussion on a given topic) (Figure 9).

**Figure 9. Typology of comments in the sample, according to the relevance of the comment**



Source: Horváth et al. (2010)

The hierarchical categorization of users along their levels of contribution in the above research confirms the theoretical categorization formulated by Kozinets (1999). In this latter, the author differentiates between two main dimensions along which users can be characterized. These dimensions are the relationship that the person has with the consumption activity and the intensity of the social relationships the person possesses with other members of the virtual community. These dimensions lead to the creation of four distinct member types: devotees, insiders, tourists and minglers (Kozinets, 1999: 255). Moreover, Dörnyei and Mitev (2010) distinguish between voluntary experts, actual experts (corresponding in Horváth et al.'s (2010) research approximately to the categories of "affected" and "expert", respectively), advertisers (a possible subset of the "off-topic"

category in our findings), enquirers (similarly to our category of "enquirers"), and dabblers (comparable to the category of "exhibitionists"). The authors note that it is crucial to identify these roles in a study of online communities because the contributions in each group need to be taken into consideration at different levels (Dörnyei – Mitev, 2010: 62).

In a marketing point of view, such online spaces are suitable to be the scenes of a corporate activity of content (and/or buzz) monitoring and thereby to identify perceived common issues in relation to the brand or the products or services produced by the firm. Moreover, as Kozinets et al. (2010) note, subvert advertising hidden behind a one-time user comment is detected and ostracized by the community. The only viable and tolerated possibility therefore that remains for the organization is to provide solutions to the identified problems, all by signaling openly a company presence upon the given channel.

Altogether, the study points out, and thus way corroborates that in the case of pieces of news or information related to a product or organization present on such channels perceived credibility and authenticity were most important than actual truth. This latter finding is already a main point of concern in the study of civic press gaining ground against professional news outlets (see e.g. Jurrat, 2011). Based on the analysis of the comments included in the sample, credibility can be achieved through validation. Such validating elements are for example the presence of multiple references (e.g. provided outside sources through hyperlinks, or narratives of personal experience), duplication, i.e. the presence of the same piece of information on various online spaces (offering continuity, links and feedback) and the presence of perceived experts within the community.

Independently of the topic that an analyzed online space in the sample had, a pool of more universal buzzwords, idioms and topics were identified that more likely triggered interest. An important finding is that positively biased posts performed a lot poorer in the sample than negative ones. This however contradicts the findings by Berger and Milkman's (2012) results of an analysis of an American sample, leading to believe the existence of cultural specificities. Moreover, posts in the sample with certain buzzwords related to gossip, sensationalism and sex were found to generate more interest, as well as those that had a topic in connection with certain subcultures overrepresented on the internet (e.g.

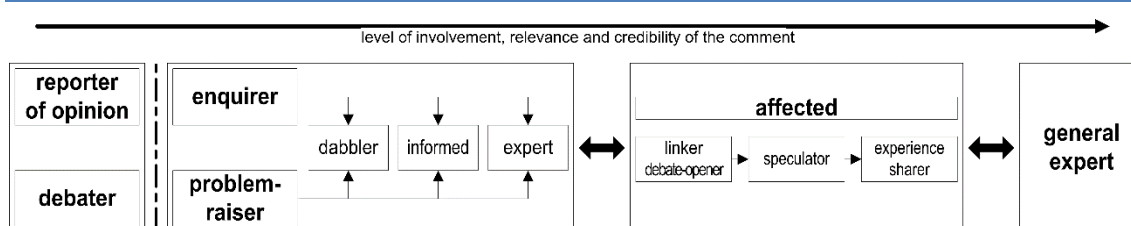
apple fans, cyclists), while the use of language (e.g. emphasizing outstanding parameters of a product or service in question) equally had a relative comment-generating effect among users, just like topics with an indicated sequel.

## 7.2. The contribution of online social spaces to innovation diffusion and adoption

Csordás and Nyirő (2012) study the role in innovation acceptance of informal online spaces (blogs, message boards) generating collective intelligence in a qualitative content analysis of 2200 comments.

The study of a sample gathered of comments to posts on professional portals corroborates the findings of Horváth et al. (2010) presented in Chapter 7.1. about the classification of users along their level of involvement, and thus the different added value of their respective contribution (Figure 10).

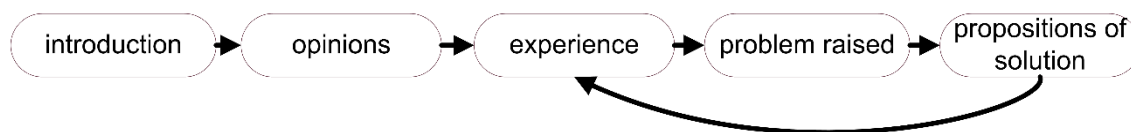
**Figure 10. Typology of comments in the sample, according to the level of involvement**



Source: Csordás – Nyirő (2012: 6)

The study identifies in the context of a grassroots message board a typical chain of comment flow (Figure 11) along commenters' demand and supply of information. According to our study, if a user (be they individuals or representatives of an organization) who joins the discussion at any moment perceives the same flow of comments, they can assess the current state of the conversation, the cycles of responses, and thereby map the working mechanisms of the given online spaces or community.

**Figure 11. The flow of comments in forums dealing with smartphones in the sample**



Source: Csordás – Nyirő (2012: 7)

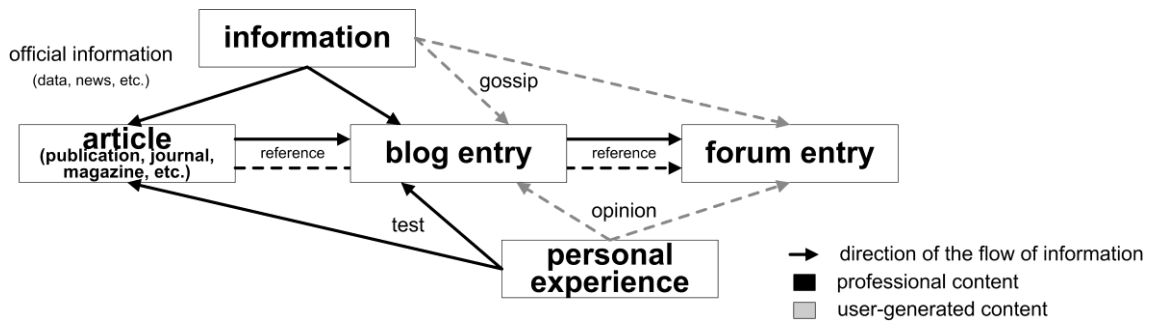
By joining the comment flow with the various identified user roles, a visitor is provided a mental image of the potential individual added value the given channel might offer them. Thus way, for example,

- the general depth of the information gap between the roles of general expert and exhibitionist as well as the relative weight of each type of comment in the overall information flow are an indication of the seriousness of a communication channel,
- the general pattern of the comment flow may be an indication of whether a newly active commenter can, and if yes, the required time for them to receive a relevant answer for their inquiry,
- by identifying the life cycle of a comment flow, the reader may consider whether the given information flow is fit for initiating a new flow of comments with a new request or inquiry.

The holistic study of the information flow in the various online discussions recorded in the sample can serve as a basis for the main empirical study of the present dissertation by offering handholds on how to identify the most probable sources of individual information units and the potential outcomes and added value of following outside hyperlinks provided by commenters in the sample (Figure 12).



**Figure 12. Flow of information in the studied sample**



**Source: Csordás – Nyirő (2012: 8)**

In the sample, online message boards were identified as the most extensive sources of information. Our study finds that online message boards as grassroots information sources are "primarily built upon interaction, exchange of information and experience between users; the basic condition for their operation is participation, i.e. the active dialog between a community of visitors (collective intelligence). The advantage of an informal information channel is to be built upon both non-official and official (in an indirect way, through hyperlinks) information sources." Message boards are those virtual channels where all kinds of information (and disinformation) can be found, "from official links to the manufacturer's page, through references to products tests appearing in professional press and personal experiences to simple gossip" (Csordás – Nyirő, 2012: 8).

"In contrast, blogs are in the middle of official and non-official, formal and informal, personal and corporate channels, their authenticity depends on the combination of preceding sources of information and channels". An advantage of blogs is to be somewhat edited thanks to the framework provided by blog hosts (e.g. the original blog entry and the comments left by visiting users being physically separated). One can note that the blog owners' "personality as well as their principles of information sorting and gathering are in themselves an indicator of authenticity for visitors". The possibility to comment blog entries "leave place for user interaction, ensuring the possibility of any added (outside) information", and the concentration of information thereby (Csordás – Nyirő, 2012: 8).

Even though the above research did not include fan pages or communities in social networking sites, it is worth mentioning them as potential consumer information sources. These channels can be characterized by a direct connection to users' personal profiles (and

can often only be consulted after having logged onto them), while users (contrarily to message boards or blogs) in most cases assume their own names and image when commenting. Thus way the most extreme (inappropriate, pointless) cases of user manifestations can be filtered out. Moreover, fan pages can be constructed around activities (e.g. hobbies, events, ideas, advocacy) or be linked to brands, thereby contributing to the creation of brand communities. Brand communities can thus be either managed by the brand (official brand pages), or by a community of users (grassroots communities). In this latter case, it is the activity that determines the circle of community members and managers (e.g. an event in social media can be managed by the organizers, while an advocacy page by activists of an idea).

It is important to note that the decentralized nature of the internet foretells that one source of information in itself is insufficient for making a grounded decision, and users are required to check the authenticity of information (Greer, 2003), and thereby to consult various sources.

### **7.3. The concurrent use of official and non-official, mass and social media in building consumer brand equity**

The study by Horváth et al. (2012) can be considered a direct antecedent to the main empirical research of the present dissertation. The study examines transforming media content consumption on a sample of 170 consumer narratives completed by 4500 user comments. The study concludes that non-official sources of information about media contents (e.g. blogs, fan pages) have an ever growing importance in the media content consumption of participants. These sources supplement and in some cases replace traditional content consumption.

**The involvement of content consumers in popular episodic audiovisual contents** (in the study: tv shows) **is shown to be relatively strong, to the point of transcending the content itself.** Based on our study, consumer manifestations reveal

- the supplementary nature of user-generated contents
- the community-building function of media contents
- manifestations of fandom in the digital space.

In the second part of the study, an online content analysis showed that user-generated content about tv shows were perceived based on commenters' perception in the sample as supplements, and even as replacement to the original product (the tv show itself). Thus an important result of the study is to provide empirical evidence to the paradoxical situation of **indirect consumption**, that is, to the phenomenon when the consumption of various televisual contents present in public discourse is replaced by that of user-generated accounts on the content. Put in more general terms, our study sheds light on a new consumer strategy along which interested non-consumers get into contact with a focal content (i.e. information on the happenings of an episode of a tv show) in a targeted, although indirect way, by the consumption of another type of content (i.e. user-generated accounts on the show).

In this context the sharing of content (and the related experience) can be interpreted as a **novel driving force of (online) social communications**, and in extreme cases might even become independent of the content itself. Moreover, fans in our study are shown to be often critical about the subject of their fandom, as well as about the extra services provided by content creators, and they discuss them via social media channels.

Parallel to that, based on our analysis, the producers of the contents hardly integrated and/or considered active users' feedback on adjusting their activity to expressed consumer needs. Thus way, for example, consumers often deplored the absence of online catch-up possibilities for tv shows or the insufficient amount of available information. In a wider sense, the above is an indication that brand owners still only loosely integrate the voice of the crowds in their marketing communications activity, and allow for an uncontrolled meaning-making by the audience, and in some cases, an appropriation of them. In contrast, our consumer narrative analysis showed that the generation of discourse in the

online social sphere (in a direct or indirect way) can be an effective supplementary tool in triggering consumption situations.

Our study equally raises interesting questions for the marketing communication profession. First, it is interesting to consider to what extent and in what conditions various forms of consumer-generated advertisement are able to supplement and/or replace traditional advertising. Are, for example, internet memes that include brands or direct or indirect brand mentions to build (or impair) marketing communication value? Second, along what patterns user-generated content, and user-generated product reviews contribute to the marketing efforts of an organization? At lastly – in connection to our analysis on the doubled target audiences in marketing communications (see Chapter 4.4), how do content consumers relate to promotional messages consumed as entertaining or informative content, and does this type of content contribute to reaching the organization's effective marketing target audiences?

## **8. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH: INTERNET MEMES AND THEIR VALUE IN MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS**

Very few articles so far deal with the relationship of online memes with various business-related (e.g. marketing) issues. The study of online memes is a particularly recent phenomenon: of the scholarly empirical works found in the available databases, all originated from the 2010's (e.g. Bayerl – Stoyanov, 2014; Bellar et al., 2013; Kucuk, 2014; Shifman, 2012, 2013; Wiggins – Bowers, 2014).

The study of memes is interesting in this particular research area for they are inherently user-generated, are the result of a high-involvement participation and are a peculiar form of information dissemination. Focusing the dissertation's empirical research on memes can equally be justified by a rapidly changing marketing communications environment with a shifting emphasis toward user-generated content, of which internet memes are a prominent and peculiar form. Beside monitoring conversations with and between users and consumers (e-wom (for more in detail, see Markos-Kujbus, 2013)), entertainment is gaining ground as a viable channel and topic of communication.

Entertaining content (see Chapter 4.3) is all the more important that it is a manner of utility maximization for users: traditional media (and especially television viewing) has already been accounted for as the most economical form of entertainment (i.e. having the most favorable reward/effort or benefit/cost ratio) (Gálik – Urbán, 2014), user-generated content takes the phenomenon to a new level, adding content creation and dissemination into the picture, with a minimal of required user effort or expenditure for a maximum cognitive effect (Horváth et al., 2013). This trend has already been discovered by both academia and practitioners, and marketing tools like merging entertainment with work and applying the use of game thinking and game mechanics in non-game contexts to engage users in solving business-related problems, with new trends like playbour (Kücklich, 2005), or gamification. In this perspective, memes are precisely a brief and playful ways to the transmitting of information (Cochoy, 2014).

Moreover, they are highly visual content sources. Since the appearance of audiovisual mass media, the elements of social communications have been constantly moving away from the written/textual information transmission paradigm of the "Gutenberg galaxy"

(Griffin, 2003). Mitchell (1992), theoretician of the pictorial turn, notes that textuality, previously typical of society as a whole (and within that, for example, science, as a discourse most often taking place in a written form) is slowly being overridden by visual communication. In addition, strong morphological similarities can be identified between the attributes and working mechanisms of memes and brands. Like branding is intended to help positively influence cognitive (and therefore necessarily visual) representations about an offering on a market with numerous similar products (Kotler – Keller, 2012: 241), memes equally compete for a place in human mind.

### **8.1. One does not simply walk into King's Landing: Theoretical foundations of memes**

The foundations of meme theory can be traced back to evolutionary biology. The concept was framed by biologist Richard Dawkins (1976), who develops on the darwinian evolutionary theory to state that while biological selection works at the level of individuals, genes are the replicators that enable variation, which is the precondition for evolution. Genes contain the genetic information material and serve at the same time as the transmission channel for the transmission thereof. According to the final thoughts of Dawkins's (1976) book, the human mind's complexity is enabled by the fact that genes are complemented by other information replicators in its evolution. These latter are referred to as memes by the authors. Memes are the units of cultural transmission, and replicators of the human cultural environment (Dawkins, 1976: 192).

In their working mechanism (e.g. diffusion patterns and evolutionary traits) memes operate similarly to genes, while in form, they are memorable units of the human mind, the evolution and diffusion of which takes place through interpersonal communications and various human artifacts as channels. According to meme theory, memes' evolution is equally the effect of blind chance and natural selection. During diffusion they continuously transform and natural selection can be observed through the proliferation of the most successful variants. Success in case of a meme means that it outperforms other similar communication messages both in lifetime and diffusion dynamics (Williams,

2000). Limitations of the human mind forces memes to compete in order to reach as much attention through as many minds as possible (Horváth et al., 2013).

"Minds are typically massively infected" (Dawkins, 1993: 20), as memes (contrary to genes) are highly flexible information carriers by being inherited through the recoding of the cerebral nervous system, without requiring a full generational turnover. However, parallel to that, memes fall short of genes in terms of copying fidelity and obedience (Horváth et al., 2013).

Dennett (1995) introduced the meme notion into the social domain, while Sperber's (1996) definition of culture welded it to the field of epidemiology (cultural epidemiology). According to this latter, memes are cultural representations with various transmission mechanisms and channels (e.g. pictures, book, sayings, etc.). While cultural memes are contagious and mutate, they are not pathological (Horváth et al., 2013). As a form of "parasitic art" (Katyal, 2010) internet memes use original texts and images as tools to communicate. They convey information framed in a peculiar way, giving way to expressing personal understandings as well as more complex, somewhat related or associated values. They convey information framed in a peculiar way, giving way to expressing personal understandings as well as more complex, somewhat related or associated values. Memes are also interesting in the sense that successful memes can be interpreted as the work of user agency, that is, as the result of intentional choices by a large number of users to disseminate and/or rework a text. In this sense, a successful meme can indeed be considered an artifact of shared social norms, common perceptions and user preferences (Shifman, 2013).

Also, the above poses an issue for marketers as human/social agency contradicts the idea behind the activity of viral marketing, as virality in this sense is a factor of context and agency, and thus a met and shared interest is a prerequisite to viral diffusion, which are independent of corporate influence (Table 4). Therefore our study does in no way assert that there is any possibility to manage or control contents appropriated by the audience. This statement calls for a consumer-sided analysis of successful content to become aware of the potential factors to facilitate viral/memetic phenomena to taking place, but equally a cautionary tale of its potential harms.

Mememes are a potential manifestation of consumer experience outside of the domain of the core service, and completely in the domain of the consumer, "embedded in the customer's

context, activities, practices, and experiences” (Medberg – Heinonen, 2014: 591). This embeddedness is all the more important that “many things consumers value do not inhere in tangible products but increasingly derive from images, cultural texts, and mediated experiences” (Fisher – Smith, 2011: 332).

By acknowledging that consumption is a form of self-expression in postmodern a society, cultural artifacts are then supposed channels for carrying brand-related user manifestations, at least in small-scale consumer tribes. Memes can also be considered artifacts of culture. First, users invest much of their time into creating, disseminating or simply by consulting and them, thus transmitting their sense of self into these cultural products (Gehl, 2014).

It is important to note that the current, colloquial use of the term meme is different from the traditional, scientific construct. While the traditional approach to memes has abstract and often controversial subjects, the colloquial interpretation refers to very specific contents (and to their derivatives). Moreover, while memetic studies focus on cultural entities that are successful on a long term, internet memes are creations with a high topicality and a sudden success, that may or may not become successful on the long term (Shifman, 2013).

In order to ensure a seamless transition between the academic and colloquial meanings of the concept of memes, Wiggins and Bowers (2014: 11) offer a hierarchical system of memetization. According to this latter, memes are

- (1) initially in a (1) **maintenance mode**. In this phase, a content needs to fulfill the basic requirement in the way to become a meme, that is, to be **spreadable** (Jenkins et al., 2013), i.e. to be interesting in some respect to be disseminated by users in their original form.
- (2) In case of (2) **emergent memes**, success brought about by spreading content is activated and a given content involves users to a point to trigger imitation and creative reinterpretation: active bricoleurs add new context and creative content to the original idea. Emergent memes are topical, and can somehow be related to the original context and message.



- (3) An idea becomes a (3) meme (in its original, scientific meaning) when it reaches a critical mass. In this **meme status**, a meme's basic idea becomes universal, cultural reinterpretation and potential subcultural aspects are replaced by mass audiences and mass usage (Williams, 2000). The original message and context are largely lost at this stage, the meme becomes self-serving. This process is greatly facilitated by the so-called meme templates, thanks to which users can generate new meanings and new messages to most renowned audiovisual contents with a minimum of required effort and added creativity. An advantage of a meme status is to have a mass cultural awareness. It also bears a paradox of a lack of context while being multicontextual: in the case of internet memes, modification as a core phenomenon allows for overstepping social and cultural boundaries set by the original (intended) meaning thus broadening the profile of the original idea (Bauckhage, 2011).

Internet memes can further be characterized by a high volatility, that is, their inception, diffusion and mutation do not follow any previously studied logic. Memes equally show a certain cyclicity. A certain internet meme can bear a specific and important meaning for a given community at a certain time (e.g. memefied echoes of events in the public sphere that trigger a massive public outcry (see e.g. Bayerl – Stoykov, 2014)). Passed the stages of initial surprise and originality triggering a massive diffusion and a large quantity of appearances, the original internet meme wears out, loses its original message, and new memes take its place with more topical and relevant messages for the target groups (Williams, 2000). However, on the level of certain subcultures (see e.g. the case of the Apple Newton device in an engaged brand community, years after it being officially abandoned by the manufacturer (Schau – Muñoz, 2006)) the meme can survive, and reemerge with a potential future fashion wave (e.g. retro as a fashion). In order to assess a meme status, one might consider the two informational dimensions proposed by Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011), namely the half-life of information and the depth of information. The concept of half-life of information, derived from physical sciences, designates the time interval during which a piece of information loses half of its value (Burton and Kebler 1960). In other words, it refers to the availability and appearance of information on the screen or in the line

of interest of users. The depth of information represents the richness and diversity of available content (Csordás et al., 2014).

In a similar way, Horváth et al.'s empirical study (2014) the lifecycle of internet memes is subdivided into four stages: (1) birth, (2) transformation, (3) diffusion, (4) appeasement (Table 9). In this categorization, the authors devote a last, separate stage to a meme's appeasement. At this stage, only fanatics or sustainers keep a meme alive, for various professional or personal reasons. This phase can contribute to the understanding of memes' durability (and – referring to Wiggins and Bowers's (2014) categorization, to reaching a meme status): while some fashionable internet memes only last for a few days until they reach the appeasement status, others can last for years. These latter are those that are equipped to successfully tackle wearing out.

**Table 9. The meme life cycle model**

	<b>Birth</b>	<b>Transformation</b>	<b>Diffusion</b>	<b>Appeasement</b>
<b>Actor</b>	selector, reviewer, capturer of moments	bricoleur, chemist	sharer, modifier	fanatic, sustainer
<b>Act</b>	recognizing noteworthy moments	connecting unrelated things, unusual connections	expressing liking and active sharing	maintaining certain versions of the meme, slowing the meme's decline
<b>Context</b>	chosen element in original context	chosen element in new context	chosen element in diverse new contexts	modified element in diverse new contexts
<b>Tools</b>	traditional and new media tools	photoshop, meme-generators	social media sites, meme-generators	social media sites, blogs, news portals

Source: based on Horváth et al. (2014: 105)

In Wiggins and Bowers's (2014) words, what differentiates emergent memes from memes is having reached a critical mass. This idea can be paraphrased as meme status is reached when a content has entered popular culture. Contrasting this view with Bayerl's (2014) study, and Williams's (2000) remarks on memes' potential for businesses, one can say that emergent memes possess a stronger utility for marketing communications as a topical vehicle for current and well-defined messages, whereas memes are largely universal but – unless equipped with clear semiotic markers – the original message largely disappears thus making the meme a relatively poor message carrier. While a brand can be present visually and/or textually in a memefied internet meme (e.g. Figure 18), brand message transmission might still be limited because of the aforementioned loss or distortion of original meaning: targeted messages can easily get lost in the clutter of memes often incoherent or incomprehensible in their message and often too similar to each other in

structure. At the same time a brand presence that can directly be identified with the brand even long after a related original marketing communications effort is the sign of brand success (see e.g. Figure 16).

Memes often tend to essentialize, oversimplify and exaggerate the themes and topics they address. Internet memes are the imprint of a peculiar (simple, yet extremely expressive) representation of their generators' realities: while they are based on seized, spontaneous, unsolicited, but thereby authentic moments.

The trimmed-down nature of memes (in contrast to, for instance, user discussions) does not allow for development or discussion within one meme. However its appearance within and dissemination amongst communities through reframing does so. Thus, within given communities (e.g. Reddit) discussions about memes and collective sense-making might appear. Moreover, a personal reading of a meme can be disseminated by creating and sharing a new, personalized variant of the meme. In most of cases, a response meme will only bear little difference with the original.

The above attributes make internet memes more than a mere pool of humorous images and therefore provide a solid ground for their systematic diffusion and popularity. The importance of internet memes going beyond subcultures was recognized at the beginning of the 2010's, when decontextualized, yet highlighted moments of public figures' slip-ups came to be a daily occurrence first on social media then on traditional media. Transcending a purely entertainment function, internet memes thereby became a channel of public opinion (Nooney – Portwood-Stacer, 2014).

In the following, we define memes as **a pool of variants of iconic visual/audio/textual contents spread by and to the internet folk that have already undergone transformation, yet still bear a number common properties and shared meanings for a given community, and that frequently originate from unintentional sources** (Horváth et al., 2013: 149; Nooney – Portwood-Stacer, 2014; Shifman, 2013: 367; Zittrain, 2014). Within this, our study focuses on still images with text that originate from a source known to a given target group and that have been repurposed, mixed and tagged by that group thus acquiring new meanings.

## 8.2. Design of the study

Even if it is inevitable to mention them and make use of their specific elements, the following study is in no stance intended to be a memetic or a semiotic, nor a diffusion study. In our study, positioned as a netnography, we investigate internet memes as objects of popular culture with potential implications for the fields of marketing and communications, and thus adhere to the above definition. Therefore, in the following, the word meme will be used as a short-hand term for internet meme, denoting popular, mostly humorous user-generated images that can be encountered and spread (both by means of sharing and by creative transformation and reinterpretation) on the internet.

Netnography proved to be a valuable source of marketing intelligence for a study in a similar context, where a media brand was put to the focus. Fisher and Smith (2011: 347) find, in connection with the Indiana Jones universe, that brand meanings and perceptions are susceptible to change when reconstructed by the community or included in a specific lifestyle. However the authors reveal that brand echoes in communities can help diagnose brand perception problems (see also: Kates, 2004) which can trigger measures from the organization to challenge and counteract alternative portrayals or hijacking. Moreover, the authors find that there do exist dedicated consumers who are willing – through these communities – to address these potential brand flaws themselves (e.g. by standing up for the brand in a discussion, or by offering hints of solution to given problems). The research responds to the further research directions proposed e.g. by Shao (2009: 19) in investigating the meanings users may obtain from the use of user-generated media in a qualitative manner. In the following study, instead of focusing on brand communities, we analyze the "average users'" cultural and creative manifestations to extend and test these statements in another context.

“When studying memes it is important to start by carefully considering the context in which certain memes are produced and consumed” – warn Bellar et al. (2013: 20) in their study of religious memes. Our study investigating creative expressions outside of the field of brand communities is ambitious in the sense that it deprives the study from a controlled and malleable sampling and analytical framework. To counter this handicap, in our analysis of memes as a message transmission channel we chose to perform our netnography with a directed sampling around a specific and predefined topic. Thus, the

**unit of our analysis** in our study is internet memes, and the **research universe** all the related still images with or without superimposed texts in the topic of the Game of Thrones universe.

### 8.2.1. Cultural entrée

In a first stance, we performed an initial exploratory observation in November-December 2014. During this phase, we first observed a number of potential research contexts in order to frame the research topic. Here, building on our prior studies presented in chapter 7.3. we considered various Hungarian and international media brands.

The reason behind ultimately choosing the framework of Game of Thrones was its role in popular culture, i.e. a wide awareness and topicality, as well as the intense and extensive user activity related to it.

- Since the tv-show's premiere in April 2011 on HBO USA, the series has become sufficiently embedded in popular culture. It has a wide potential of intelligibility even for those who do not watch the series. At the same time, this universality makes it possible to differentiate between meme legibility and lucidity, for instance, shared and contrasted meanings, or meme variations.
- This discussion of sort is a more neutral ground to studying user narratives than previous, more cause-related studies (e.g. Bellar et al. (2013) for religious memes, or Kucuk (2014) for antibranding). The framework of Game of Thrones as an artifact of popular culture offers a controlled approach for studying a somewhat larger range of topics. On a first degree, it obviously involves consumer manifestations related to the series itself, however, we argue that the generality and generalizability of the message might offer deeper insight into and intelligence of other – related – societal and marketing patterns and issues.
- Moreover, the author of the present dissertation is himself a consumer and maven of the elements of the Game of Thrones universe, both as regards the tv series inasmuch as the book series. According to Kozinets (2006: 133), being in possession of emic meanings "allows the netnographer to speak with authority as a member who represents other members of that culture". Even if the present study remains a purely observational (i.e. non-participant) netnography, this factor can

be an asset in various contexts and possible interpretations thereof (Horváth – Mitev, 2012).

To confirm that the Game of Thrones universe is fit for serving as a base for our main study, we conducted a multi-phase exploratory study. In a first stance, we performed an initial exploratory observation (Dörnyei – Mitev, 2010) on the available internet memes and various contents in the Game of Thrones universe. In this phase we were searching using search engines for the terms “Game of Thrones”, “Game of Thrones memes”, “George RR Martin memes” as well as various other terms stemming from these latter (e.g. “You know nothing memes”) with the goal of identifying potential internet sites for sampling. This research phase that lasted for about two months can be characterized as the phase of **immersion** into the topic that made the in-depth study of user meaning-generation possible.

**Table 10. Phases of the cultural entrée**

<b>November 2014</b>	Framing of the research topic; Search for resources; Study of various media brands that generate a large number of internet memes; Selection of the final research context  <i>output: Game of Thrones universe finalized as the framework of study</i>
<b>December 2014</b>	Exploratory study: student sample (task: generate own Game of Thrones memes and write a narrative about the context thereof) and related feasibility study  <i>output: The Game of Thrones universe is relevant for conducting a marketing focused empirical study</i>
<b>December 2014 – January 2015</b>	Immersion; Finding internet sites and spaces related to the topic; Narrowing the potential spaces for sampling; Observations; Research notes; Preliminary sampling  <i>output: Determining the directors and spaces for sampling; Preparation of sampling; Research notes.</i>
<b>End of January 2015</b>	Sampling from chosen sites and spaces; Complementary sampling; Data cleaning; Finalization of the research sample  <i>output: Research sample composed of 715 internet memes</i>

Parallel to this, a preliminary feasibility study was performed. Here, university students were tasked with creating internet memes that were later analyzed for the topics appearing within.

### **8.2.2. A brief review of the Game of Thrones universe**

Game of Thrones (GOT) is originally the first volume of a series of (currently) five (and two additional planned) fantasy novels entitled A Song of Ice and Fire (ASOIAF) written by George R.R. Martin (GRRM). It is equally the title of the large-scale television film series based on the novels. The first volume of book series was published in 1996, followed by subsequent volumes in 1998, 2000, 2005, and 2011. The book series has been translated into more than 40 languages. It only became a bestseller in 2011, following the success of the tv series produced by HBO.

The story of A Song of Ice and Fire takes place in a fictional world inspired by the Middle Ages. The storyline includes a number of differences from the familiar genre elements that contribute to the success of the series. While the book series pertains to the genre of epic fantasy, with elements like magic, dragons, and mythology-inspired intelligent spiritual beings that parallel to the human species appearing in the story, it however operates with mythical elements to a lot lesser extent, and puts the emphasis on character development, relationships and conflicts.

The world that makes up the story's universe is enormous. The plot takes places on two continents, in the viewpoint of at least nine Great Houses and related backstories, and numerous lesser houses and characters. Three main stories interweave all along the volumes of A Song of Ice and Fire, while additional viewpoints and side-plots introduced over time make the story even more complex. One of the most important main plot line with the most viewpoint characters deals with a dynastic war among several families for control of the continent Westeros. Another main plot line is about a rising threat of the supernatural creatures called Others beyond Westeros' northern border called The Wall, a colossal fortification which stretches for 300 miles, while the last plot line shows the ambition of the last member of a Great House in exile on the continent of Essos to to reclaim the Iron Throne, main authority of Westeros<sup>17</sup>. The books are divided into

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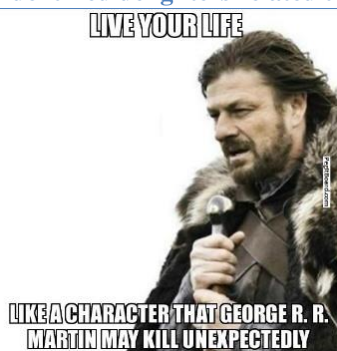
<sup>17</sup> [http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_t%C5%B1z\\_%C3%A9s\\_j%C3%A9g\\_dala](http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_t%C5%B1z_%C3%A9s_j%C3%A9g_dala), Accessed: Feb 22, 2015.



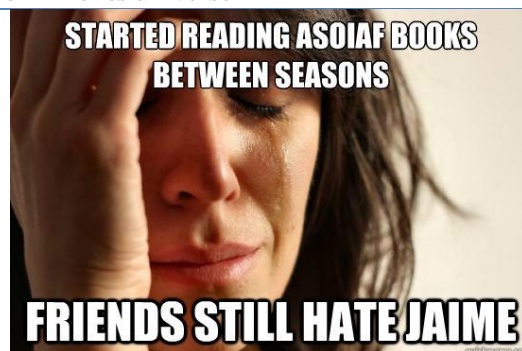
chapters, each one narrated in the third person limited through the eyes of a point of view character, which leads to numerous plotlines throughout the series. The first volume of the books, *The Game of Thrones* contains nine POV characters, but the number thereof constantly increases with the advance of the story. Until the end of the fifth and so far last book entitled *A Dance with Dragons*, 31 POV characters have been altogether used<sup>18</sup>.

Foreshadowing a result of our research, the massive universe of the book as well as its original storyline can be considered **delighters** and thus success factors of the brand (Figure 13/c). One can consider often occurring sadism, brutality and sexuality as other distinctive marks of the series, for which the author has been subjected to considerable criticism. However the related media buzz has undeniably contributed to raising further awareness to the series. Much criticism stems for example from the author's peculiar technique in shaping the books' story by ruthlessly eliminating characters that had been perceived as fundamental to the story (Figure 13/a), or by making characters go through complete behavioral turnaround, thus potentially confusing one-time consumers, or consumers in different stages of the story's consumption (Figure 13/b).

**Figure 13. Identified delighters related to the Game of Thrones universe**



(a) X\_161



(b) RES\_104



(c) X\_019

<sup>18</sup> [http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_t%C5%B1z\\_%C3%A9s\\_j%C3%A9g\\_dala](http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_t%C5%B1z_%C3%A9s_j%C3%A9g_dala), Accessed: Feb 22, 2015.



### 8.2.3. Preliminary study: Student sample

Participating students were asked in November 2014 to create memes themselves, with the only constraint that it should use the theme of the Game of Thrones series (no instructions were however given whether they should include the tv-series and/or the book series, nor whether they should use the GOT-themes is text and/or picture). In total, 64 usable student memes were collected with brief descriptions of their work. In this research phase we tested the ratio of meme template usage versus creative, self-made contents. We also observed the addressed topics, and the presence of any sign of marketing-related added value.

While many used well-known meme templates (Figure 14/a), there was a surprising amount of respondents who used self-created contents, showing a higher level of user involvement. There was also one case, where a respondent confused a well-know meme template of Sean Bean playing Boromir in The Lord of the Rings trilogy with the Game of Thrones universe (Figure 14/f), which is an interesting sign of the manifestation of the working mechanisms of unaided brand awareness.

We found that, beyond the reflections on the series itself, among the addressed topics the most obvious were students' own lives (Figure 14/b), which gave a preliminary confirmation of the fact that the Game of Thrones memes are potentially expandable outside of the realm of television viewing and as such, are wider elements of popular culture. Interestingly, even wider political and social topics were addressed through these memes, which foreshadowed that the universe, studied through a larger sample, can serve as an echo of a wider social entity (Figure 14/c). Intertextuality as a cultural element was equally present through allusions to further media brands, which is a sign of a higher level of user meaning-making, but also that of a competitive media consumption landscape (Figure 14/d).

Finally, as a quite unexpected turn, not even the sample contained traces of brand-related content, but direct brand manifestations could be observed, as linked to the Game of Thrones universe (Figure 14/e), foreshadowing an interesting analysis of the main sample on how a medieval/fantasy landscape triggers brand-related creative.

The analysis of this exploratory sample confirmed that the internet memes created in the Game of Thrones thematic offer a sufficiently flexible framework, and the underlying meanings are sufficiently broad for enabling users to transfer a wide variety of messages

throughout (Fisher – Smith, 2011: 343). Based on the above, we concluded that the Game of Thrones universe is a suitable channel to conducting a more in-depth analysis in the research topic.

**Figure 14. Preliminary study: Participant-created memes in the Game of Thrones universe**

**BRACE YOURSELF**

**EVERYONE WILL USE THIS MEME**

(a) meme status: shared meme templates



(b) sharing personal experiences

(“Game of The Exam Period / Winter is coming... But my mind is the strongest WEAPON / Not really what I expected... / Maybe next winter...”)

HARC A TRÓNÉRT



VESZPRÉM

IDŐKÖZI VÁLSZTÁS 2015



(c) wider social context

(“Fight for the throne / By-election in Veszprém [HU], 2015”)



(d) intertextuality: mixing memes from various sources (here: Game of Thrones and Taxi Driver) (“Are you talkin’ to me?”)



(e) brand connections

(“Really there’s no problem, but may I suggest you try out Vichy’s 3-in-1 facial cleanser”)



(f) (unintentionally) confounded memes

(“When I missed my entry exam to Corvinus by 1 point... / ...it still seemed a good idea to go home to King’s Landing”)

#### 8.2.4. Sampling

Following the view that netnographers are methodological bricoleurs (Kozinets, 2006: 132) we used a multi-source sample. The reason behind this was a better fit for our research questions. For example, we discarded the use of a sampling composed only of search engine results (e.g. Kucuk, 2014) for being too narrow and specific to one or another given meme template. This latter would have offered a sample visually more homogeneous but more diverse in terms of content and meanings.

Parallel to that, the exclusive use of one or another meme image aggregator (e.g. Reddit, 9GAG) was equally discarded. In this case, one specific site could have been considered as a community or a subculture, with peculiar distinguishing marks, which once again was against our initial will of examining a larger cultural context. Thus, even though meme images here would better fit the philosophy of the study, a distorting effect might appear during a standalone use thereof in the sample because of the uploaders and raters belonging to a narrower community. Therefore, following the view that netnographers are methodological bricoleurs (Kozinets, 2006: 132), we resorted to a multi-source sample.

The sampling was based on the sources that most often appeared as search engine results during the immersion phase of our study. These sources were most often social media spaces. However, instead of putting the emphasis on one or the other narrow community as mentioned beforehand, we included multiple similar sources into the sample. As each one of the identified sources often bore hundreds or thousands of relevant elements, we sought to put the emphasis on successful internet memes during our sampling process. Therefore – in order to include internet memes in our sample that average users might have encountered several times during browsing – we took into consideration the available popularity indicators on each site. Accordingly, whenever possible, the most popular images of each site were included in the final sample. The fact that approximately 100 exact matches were removed from the sample during the data cleaning phase gives an indication that a relatively large overlap was observable between the most popular elements of each source and that the final sample is effectively likely to contain contents meaningful to a general public and not only to various subcultures. This can be considered a practical success of the above method.

Following the indications of grounded theory methodology on theoretical saturation (Sandelowski, 2008) we used each selected site in our sampling to a point when disturbing redundancies and/or uninteresting or incomprehensible content streams were found<sup>19</sup>. This process lead to determining of a sampling threshold for each site present in our sample.

Making use of the adaptive nature of netnography, we conducted a complementary sampling based on our initial research phase with the goal of offering a more comprehensive base for analysis. During sampling it was possible in many cases to follow a number of links or references provided by the uploaders and/or commenters (e.g. by observing the discussions related to the posted meme image, or images displayed at the opening of the result of an image search, etc.). User discussions related for given internet memes (apart from a few exceptionally interesting cases recorded in our research notes) were not taken into account for the sake of the present research. User discussions related for given internet memes (apart from a few exceptionally interesting cases recorded in our research notes) were not taken into account for the sake of the present research.

The sampling took place on January 20, 26, and February 1, 2015. Our sampling methodology consisted of downloading the images to be included in the final sample accompanied by the building of a database with the coordinates of and other notes about the downloaded contents (e.g. related internet sites, occurring topics, research notes, etc.). These research notes were used in the following data analysis. The structure of the final sample can be seen in Table 11. For the full sample, with individual hyperlinks and the results of our primary coding see Annex 1.

The initial sample was subject to a process of data cleaning where irrelevant elements as well as matching contents were removed from the sample. However the notion of matching content is problematic. As seen beforehand, a critical aspect of internet memes is diffusion through multiplication. At the same time the sample would have suffered from another 100 elements that are exact replicas of elements already included previously. Therefore during data cleaning only exact matches were removed. The reason behind this was that these elements can be considered as spreadable media, but no further effort was made by their respective uploaders to modify their content. On the other hand sample

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<sup>19</sup> One example to this was the case when on one of the sites in the sample, images with lower ratings started failing to load after a certain time.

elements with even slight differences with previous elements might contain important traces in the understanding of the process of memefication and were therefore kept within the sample.

**Table 11. The research sample**

Source	Description	Threshold	Sample size after data cleaning
9GAG	Social media website of general entertainment that enables users to share user-generated images.	first 100 most popular entries with the “thrones” tag	97
		complementary sample of the first 25 most popular entries with the “george rr martin” tag	23
Memes landing .com	Specialized meme aggregator.	first 200 most popular entries	175
		complementary sample of additional relevant entries outside of the domain of the fixed threshold	23
Reddit	An entertainment, social networking, and content sharing website built around special areas of interest (called subreddits). Sampling here was limited to visual entertainment content related to the Game of Thrones universe, available on the related subreddit (/r/aSongOfMemesAndRage/).	first 200 most popular (on Reddit, referred to as “upvoted”) entries	171
		complementary sample of additional relevant entries outside of the domain of the fixed threshold	7
other	Complementary search engine findings (e.g. Google Images searches and sites found by virtue thereof [e.g. thematic Pinterest sites, articles on the best Game of Thrones memes, etc.]; additional 9GAG and Reddit sources).		219
<i>Total:</i>			<i>n = 715</i>

## 8.3. Data analysis

### 8.3.1. Meme status

Studying memes is also about studying the innate conflict between imitation (stability, common ground) and alteration (evolution). A question that arises in our research is whether it indeed investigates genuine memes.

Based on our literature review on memetics and on Wiggins and Bowers's (2014) categorization, most of the images in our sample do not correspond to the classic definition of memes. However, we also saw that the internet folk's perception of the concept is more lenient, and our definition of internet memes is equally broader and permissive. At the same time creative users, by uploading images that appose elements of the Game of Thrones universe with other elements that hardly have any direct connection with the series, themselves participate in the process of memefication of the series while diffusing contents, elements, personal accounts and meanings of, and globally the fame of the series. The research universe in itself can thus be considered a wider-scale meme in the sense that the tv-series thanks to its wide audience and awareness, unites a great number of people and generates high involvement and contribution from their part. In our further analysis however we will follow the broader definition of internet memes.

In Wiggins and Bowers's (2014) categorization only one genuine meme was found in the sample: the phrases “brace yourself/ves” and “... is coming”, often coupled with the image of Ned Stark’s character (played by actor Sean Bean) ("Imminent Ned" meme<sup>20</sup>). In the context of the latter, many examples of messages were found that had no connection whatsoever with the original message, which is a possible sign of its meme status: the meme is so deeply ingrained in popular internet culture and its language, that it now generalized to ostentatiously announce anything that is about to occur (Figure 15). In a few situations, these combinations of the image template and superimposed texts are degraded to being so-called response memes, used in conversations instead of emoticons or emojis. Building on the attribute of being essentialized and trimmed-down information carriers, response memes, as compared to emoticons or emojis, carry extended amounts

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<sup>20</sup> <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/imminent-ned-brace-yourself-winter-is-coming>, Accessed: Feb 22, 2015.



of information to a point that they can appear as viable substitutes for given figures of speech and/or sayings in conversations. While this status helps keep the meme alive, it is a phase where a meme becomes a “replicator in its own right” (Williams, 2000: 273), slowly losing any actual meaning associated to it. This area of usage can be considered the widest field of application of a meme and therefore a manifestation of a genuine meme status.

**Figure 15. Issues related to the most popular meme template related to the Game of Thrones („Brace yourself...”): random messages**



The "Imminent Ned (Brace yourself)" meme's status is interesting for several reasons. The source of the original meme uploaded by a user as a template onto a meme-generator site does not originate from the series itself, but it is one of HBO's promotional portraits of the character of Ned Stark (played by Sean Bean), head of the house the motto ("winter is coming") of which is used. The text "brace yourself" is not mentioned in the book or the series, only on the posters.

Another noteworthy moment here is that actor Sean Bean (himself a source of several memes) often plays characters who die during a movie. In Game of Thrones, he does so at the end of season 1 (as well as in the first book of the series). Yet the character seems to have made such dent in the audience that at the moment of the inception of the present study, four years after its death in the series, the internet meme based on the character of Ned Stark is at the core (Figure 16) of the Game of Thrones-related imagery recorded in our sample. In the "Imminent Ned (Brace yourself)" meme Sean Bean's character lives on through the phenomenon of consumer **hyperreality** and the alternative universe it offers, and thus the meme contributes to the **mythification** (Podoshen et al., 2014) of the series as a brand.

Figure 16. The "Brace yourselves" meme is still thriving, 4 years after the death in tv of its main character



The sample contains a larger number of elements that can be characterized as **emergent memes**. Here, the core imagery and accompanying texts are still largely based the Game of Thrones universe. However, a number of daring diversions from the original message (e.g. the contents and message of a scene taken from the series) suggest a movement towards critical mass. Examples of these emerging memes are the "You know nothing" and "Not today" buzzwords (often accompanied with the associated stills from the series),



as well as the "Scumbag George R.R. Martin" (making allusion to the author's before-mentioned peculiar storytelling, unpleasant to the one-time consumer), the "Stannis the Mannis"<sup>21</sup> or "White Walker Boss"<sup>22</sup> memes.

Memefying elements of the series can indirectly contribute to **raising awareness** to the series, by offering creative elements (e.g. images, idioms) that a larger audience can relate to, in contexts wider than a given episode of the series. As could be seen beforehand, the "brace yourself" idiom was largely popularized by the meme, **resulting in a wider range of users directly associating it with the series**. The same way, when expressing the advent of anything by announcing it using the "... is coming" phrase, spontaneous associations to the series can be assumed in the case of many audience members thanks to the meme. Through these therefore, audiences of the series and that of internet culture (and through that, internet memes) mutually reinforce each other in raising the Game of Thrones brand awareness.

Among the elements categorized as emergent memes, the following creative hooks were identified as being linked enough to the series to be identifiable, yet general enough to potentially convey meaning extensions:

- "Hodor": Simultaneously the name of a character and an interjection. Hodor is a simple-minded character of Game of Thrones with great strength who watches over one of the main characters, the young Bran Stark, during his journey beyond the Wall. The "Hodor" interjection is the only noise he ever makes, which can thus mean literally everything. The expression can directly be identified with the series, while its simplicity makes it suitable for application in different contexts.
- "Not today" (originally: "What do we say to the God of Death? Not today!"): A notable moment in the series' first season, during which Arya Stark, one of the main child characters, is being taught fencing and life in the city of King's Landing studded with intrigue and betrayal. Here, the text alone is insufficient to identify the source, but used with the associated meme template, it can grant additional awareness to the series (Figure 17/b).
- "You know nothing [Jon Snow]": "You Know Nothing, Jon Snow" is a memorable quote attributed to the Wildling character Ygritte considered by the

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<sup>21</sup> <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/stannis-the-mannis>, Accessed: Feb 22, 2015.

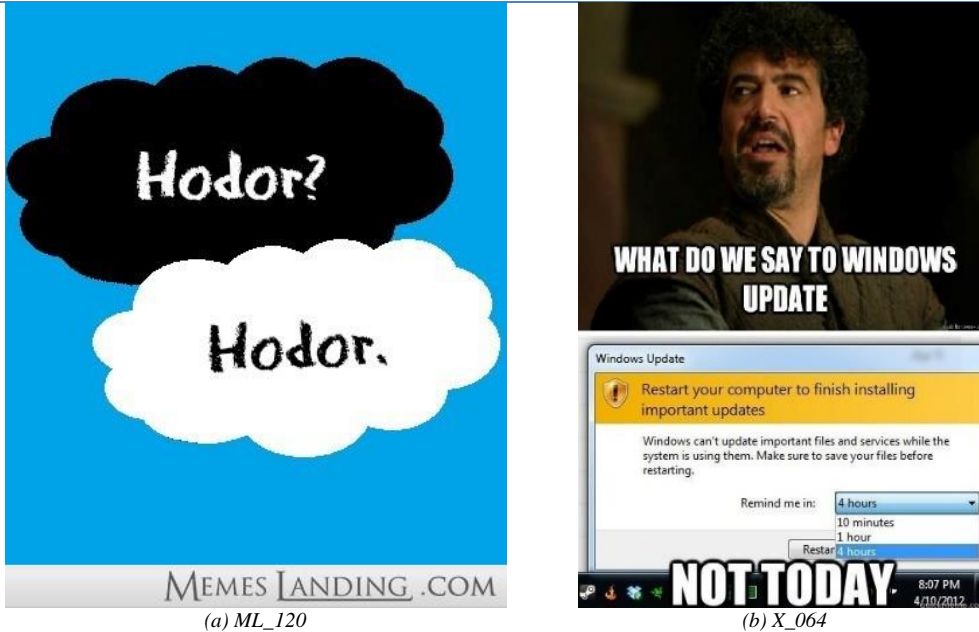
<sup>22</sup> <http://memegenerator.net/White-Walker-Boss>, Accessed: Feb 22, 2015.

Wildings as the wife through marriage by capture of Jon Snow, a protagonist of the series. By this catchphrase, she repeatedly refers to Jon Snow's immaturity.

- "A Lannister always pays his debts": Unofficial, yet as well known and used as the official motto of House Lannister, one of the main dynasties of the series (see Figure 41).

The slipstream of one widely recognized meme (as is the case with numerous tv series) can contribute to the creation of various more or less related emergent memes, as can be observed in the Game of Thrones sample. The high awareness of the Game of Thrones series makes it suitable for being used as a meme, and even as a meme template.

Figure 17. Creative hooks in the Game of Thrones universe suitable to become emergent memes



In the sample, the number of elements built upon a **meme template** exceeds 100<sup>23</sup>. For example, one can encounter several memes based on the "Hipster glasses"<sup>24</sup> template (used on Game of Thrones characters), or the "First world problems"<sup>25</sup> meme.

<sup>23</sup> the exact number is difficult to estimate because of the challenges related to the categorization of such content

<sup>24</sup> <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/hipster-glasses>, Accessed: Feb 22, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/first-world-problems>, Accessed: Feb 22, 2015.

Also, so-called "rage comics"<sup>26</sup>, the cornerstone of vernacular memetic creativity, equally appear multiple times. These memefied comics characters commonly follow a simple, not to say ugly aesthetic (Douglas, 2014), contributing to the possibility of an easy-to-use, yet highly intelligible user-generated visual storytelling approved by the audience. This is best demonstrated by the fact that our sample contains at least 15 similar comic strips.

It is noteworthy to mention those memes based on meme templates appearing in the sample that themselves are based on memefied moments of various audiovisual creations, and thus way are carriers of the "brands" of their respective sources. The most common occurrences are the "Am I The Only One Around Here / Angry Walter"<sup>27</sup> meme template from the movie *The Big Lebowski*, the "Futurama Fry / Not Sure If"<sup>28</sup> template from cartoon *Futurama*, the "Super Cool Ski Instructor"<sup>29</sup> from cartoon *South Park*, or the "Annoyed Picard"<sup>30</sup> meme from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. All of these visual references to their respective sources are provided with most often verbal additions (i.e. personalized meanings) relevant to the *Game of Thrones* series.

Another interesting meme template is that of "The Most Interesting Man in the World"<sup>31</sup>. This latter is a memefied version of an advertising campaign for the Dos Equis beer brand. It is a message hijacked by users for its strong creative hook (in the original: "I don't always drink beer, but when I do, I prefer Dos Equis"). The ad's message thus survived, however deprived from the brand, in the general form "I don't always... But when I do...". At the same time, as the image macro is based on a screen from the original ad, the product itself can still be seen on the image macro. This way, the brand wound its way to the everyday lives of the internet folk (Figure 18). This meme is a successful example of the ultimate promotional aspirations as described earlier by Gelb (1997) of marketers to produce memes by using strong enough **creative hooks** in their advertising in order for their creative elements to outlive the paid campaign phase.

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<sup>26</sup> <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/rage-comics>, Accessed: Feb 22, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/am-i-the-only-one-around-here>, Accessed: Feb 22, 2015.

<sup>28</sup> <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/futurama-fry-not-sure-if>, Accessed: Feb 22, 2015.

<sup>29</sup> <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/super-cool-ski-instructor>, Accessed: Feb 22, 2015.

<sup>30</sup> <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/annoyed-picard>, Accessed: Feb 22, 2015.

<sup>31</sup> <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/the-most-interesting-man-in-the-world>, Accessed: Feb 22, 2015.

Figure 18. The presence of beer brand Dos Equis in the sample through a meme template



### 8.3.2. Intertextuality

As we saw with the example of the "Brace Yourself..." meme, audio-visual couplings composed of stills from various audiovisual works and strongly related accompanying texts (Horváth et al., 2013) can often serve in the digital environment as substitutes to the metacommunications elements in interpersonal communications (e.g. by replacing emoticons that have smaller information transmission capacity). As a first level of intertextual references, exclamations, strong emotional reactions are illustrated in the sample through using appropriate meme templates adapted to the Game of Thrones universe. For instance, a caption with the image macro series featuring a screen capture of the Star Trek: The Next Generation character Jean-Luc Picard wearing an exasperated expression is a popular option for the internet folk to embody an annoyed reaction (Figure 19/a). The same way, a still of TV show Futurama's inane character Fry squinting his eyes is typically paired with an expression of incomprehension (Figure 19/b), or the image depicting a crying women in the "First world problems" memes with self-critical users facing petty problems (Figure 13/b).

Moreover, in order to decode some of the messages, much of the humor or sarcasm included in the memes of the sample, the receiver is often required to possess a specific cultural literacy, i.e. a certain level of awareness of internet culture (such as recognizing the genre of memes or a popular meme template) and popular culture (such as recognizing popular media characters, and in our case, characters from the series and/or their actors'.

characters in various other works, and what they represent) (Bellar et al., 2013). This inherent need for cultural literacy is apparent when hints of intertextuality appear. There is a hint of intertextuality in more than a third of the images present in our sample (see columns "commercial brand" and "media brand connection" in Annex 1).

**Figure 19. Meme templates as a means to replace interpersonal metacommunications**



Intertextuality is even stronger in the case of thematically related brands, i.e. similar audiovisual productions. Thus way, an allusion to the movie adaption of fantasy literature benchmark The Lord of the Rings that brought the genre into fashion in the beginning of the 2000's, is present in 18 images in the sample. Moreover, the mashup of the Game of Thrones universe with famous cartoons is a sign of users' broadness of spectrum in terms of free associations (with 14 elements related to Disney cartoons and 5 to Dreamworks cartoons appearing in the sample) (Figure 20/c-e).

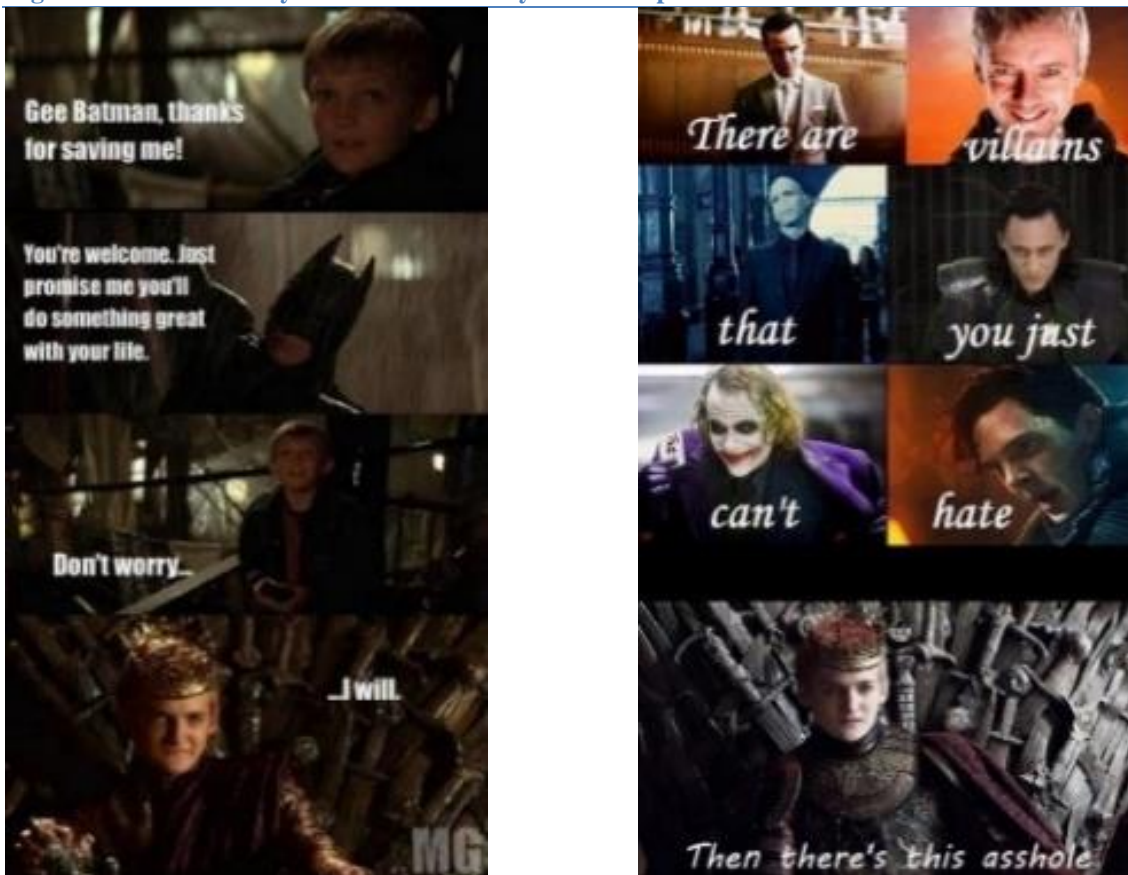
Characters of the series, as well as the actors who impersonate them are often a platform and channel of user chains of association in the sample (Figure 20/a). Among these, actor Sean Bean, protagonist of the "Imminent Ned" meme has equally been the main character since the middle of the 2000 decade of another meme (became meme template) with a thematic relationship to the fantasy universe, namely the character of Boromir from The Lord of the Rings<sup>32</sup> (Figure 14/f).

<sup>32</sup> <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/one-does-not-simply-walk-into-mordor>, Accessed: Feb 22, 2015.



The actors and their various roles can serve as another ground in the active audience expressing their attentiveness. For example, there are various allusion in the sample to actor Jack Gleeson's previous role in the 2005 movie *Batman Begins* (Figure 20/a). The same way, the searching eyes of the audience recognized actors Michelle Fairley and David Bradley equally playing together in the past in a movie with once again, much ground to audience crosstalk, namely, *Harry Potter*.

**Figure 20. Intertextuality and cultural literacy in the sample**



(a) ML\_041: Allusion to a former (2005) role in the 2005 movie *Batman: Begins* by actor Jack Gleeson (playing the villain Joffrey Baratheon in the *Game of Thrones*)

(b) ML\_067: Villains of various compared with the boy villain of *Game of Thrones*, Joffrey Baratheon



(c) ML\_027 / (d) ML\_135 / (e) X\_202: The recurring analogy of *Game of Thrones* characters depicted as cartoon character

### 8.3.3. Group dynamics

We previously called attention to the fact that our sampling choice of individual images from various sources would not leave much ground to the study of group effects and would therefore be a limitation to our research. Surprisingly though, this assumption turned out to be false. More than that, internet memes in the sample allowed for a deeper understanding of group dynamics related to the consumption of thematic memes. In this sense, the consumers of Game of Thrones memes can be categorized as neo-tribes (Cova – Cova, 2002).

Similarly to previous netnographic studies (e.g. Kozinets, 1999, or our own preliminary study described in chapter 6.1), a hierarchical group dynamic can be observed through the creative messages included in the sample. In this model, prosumers of the Game of Thrones memes take on various roles, and provide value-added content for the audience of the memes. However, unlike the previously described research results, these roles do not manifest themselves through active and textual discussions between the members of a somewhat delimited group, but embedded in visual contents. This open communication space requires a higher involvement from the sender (content creation), while its consumption takes place in **a complex experiencescape** (O'Dell, 2005), where information transfer and learning are facilitated by entertainment, aesthetics or escapism (e.g. through the narrative of comic strips).

Based on the sample the creators of these visual messages can be divided into three categories: (1) outsiders, (2) viewers of the tv-series and (3) book readers. While the categories might seem commonplace at first sight, the respective behavioral patterns that they represent are more interesting.

The presence of an **outsider** group is immediately somewhat of a surprise, as these are the users that are expressly not consumers of the contents related to the Game of Thrones universe. Yet, they contribute to the series by creating messages about it and through these messages, get included into a sample about the series (Figure 21/a). This latter would not be surprising in situations of consumption where a discussion as such could follow the consumption of a content (e.g. a Twitter feed or the comment section of a blog post). Using the typology presented in chapter 7.1., similar user contributions can be characterized into the category of "exhibitionists". In our preliminary study, this category contains, among others, replies that can be characterized as off-topic or trolling in text-

based discussions, with low added value to group dynamics. Here, however, one must take into account the fact that the analyzed user contributions are the result of a more in-depth user involvement (generation and/or sharing of a meme with a personal message). Based on the fact that during sampling we sought to include the most popular elements of each site, these outsider user contributions can be assumed to carry added value to a specific audience. By further analyzing the images classified as "outsiders", two main sub-categories emerge.

First, the **passive outsider** seems to recognize the Game of Thrones universe, but their involvement seems limited to **using meme templates as a channel for passing personal messages**. As mentioned beforehand, because of the series' meme status, many user-generated creative works build upon the semiotic elements of the original content but bear meanings that have little or no connection to the original meaning. During our preliminary research phase of internet memes, countless examples of this latter use were encountered, even though – because of the sampling methodology – very few of them got included into the sample proper (Figure 15). This usage of the meme as personal message bearer however contributes to disseminating the semiotic elements of the overall Game of Thrones universe and thereby to raising the awareness of the series through these elements (even though with a lack of coherent message). In this stance, the Game of Thrones brand relies upon its unique factors of identity. That is, whether new receivers of a piece of information carried by internet memes are able to identify and attribute the used template to the series and therefore to the brand. For example, a smaller group of early content consumers was even able to get considerable authority over the series' public image (Shifman, 2013) through successfully disseminating an original image fulfilling this condition as a meme template, even if it represents a character that doesn't even survive the first season ("Imminent Ned meme").



Figure 21. “Active outsiders” in the sample



(a) X\_111



(b) X\_099 (accompanying text: "As someone who doesn't watch Game of Thrones, this is my reaction to all the posts today about the new episode.")



(c) X\_111



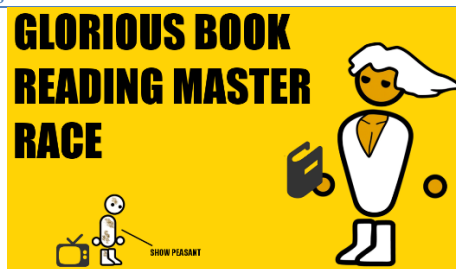
(d) 9GG\_72

The content analysis of the images categorized into the sub-category of **active outsiders** shows that their producers are familiar with a number of facts related to the series and they also embrace the series' role in mass culture (Figure 21/a). Using these as a base, self-manifestations of active outsiders can be described as protest, i.e. self-conscious and proud manifestations of counter- or oppositional culture by an express and explicit boycott of consumption. This form of self-expression, building on the self-reinforcing effect of memes, can trigger other non-consuming users to act in a similar way and inform the followers of the Game of Thrones series and culture using their very own channels of their being proud non-consumers of the series (at the same time contradictorily becoming a sub-class of the consumers of the related cultural products). In contrast to Kucuk's (2014) results, this manifestation of the outsider status in the sample is not accompanied by any form of antibranding: even though consumer exit and voice are expressed, the messages do not contain any (direct form of) agitation. They can simply be characterized as positive psychological reinforcement towards audience members in a similar position, with, however, an ever-present self-critical exchange of glances with the mass audience proper, e.g. by accepting the numerical superiority of the effective audience (Figure 21/d)

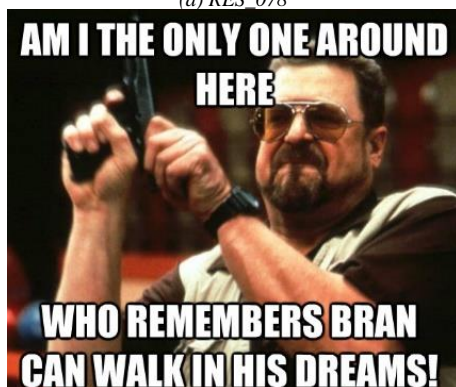
or by demonstrating being in possession of a knowledge otherwise unobtainable but through a form of consumption (Figure 21/c). This way however a sense of openness is maintained toward the future potential consumption.

The other extremity of identified consumer groups is that of **book fans**. Book readers as a group seem to perceive reading the series as a ritual (Figure 23/c). Also, an air of elitism (Figure 22/a) emerges with a notable **information superiority** (Figure 22/b) (expressed, for example, by sharing a stylized citation from the books). Information superiority in the sample is often expressed in contrasting the books with the tv series. Here, attention to detail can be mentioned as a driving force that enables the creators of the memes categorized here to emphasize the differences between the events and facts in the books and in the tv series (Figure 22/c).

Figure 22. Manifestations of book fans in the sample



(a) RES\_078



(b) 9GM\_13



(c) ML\_143

The fact that the television series act as a common ground and starting point in the sample is not only visible in meme templates but also in the creations categorized as works of book fans. Still, book fans seem to consider the books as a phenomenon that can be best described in marketing as the **extended product** (Bauer et al., 2009) and accordingly, the

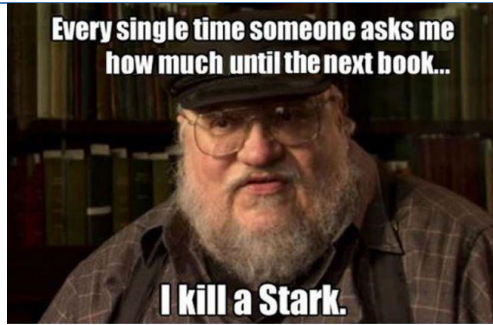
subsequent value delighters related to their content consumption equally seem to stem from this latter.

Another peculiar manifestation of the group of fans in a wider sense can equally be related to the release of the upcoming sequel to the book series. An emergent meme that is already accompanied by an identified meme template known as the "Scumbag George R.R. Martin" meme is a caricature of the author's two traits that are unacceptable in the eyes of his fans, namely the most unexpected liquidation of various main characters and the slowness of the writing process<sup>33</sup> (Figure 23/a). As a meme template, the "Scumbag George R.R. Martin" meme already has numerous user-generated specimens. Given the large number thereof, combined with the already sarcastic naming and the content analysis of the related accompanying texts in the sample, one can almost consider this very meme as **antibranding**. Moreover, based on the arguments presented hereinbefore, this antibranding process can lead to forecasting a **service gap** (Parasuraman et al., 1985) (for more in detail, see chapter 8.3.4) perceived by the consumers.

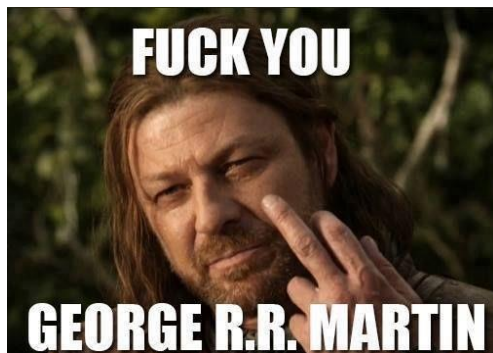
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<sup>33</sup> The series of books was first imagined as a double trilogy by the author. As of today, it seems that the series will be composed of seven volumes in total. Moreover, the time periods between the publication of two subsequent volumes seem to ever grow.

Figure 23. “Scumbag GRRM” meme template and related memes in the sample



(a) X\_140



(b) X\_153



(c) 9GM\_13

The hardness of related texts in the sample suggests a strong emotional charge felt by fans (Figure 23/b). The series' status of mass product (and indirectly, the fact of being the film adaptation of a book) might contribute to the intensity of these messages. At the same time the tv series' seasonality results in an important **performance pressure** for the producers (and indirectly for the original "owner" of the content, that is, the author, George R. R. Martin). The "Scumbag George R.R. Martin" meme in the sample leads to suggest that while the realm of the books is somewhat of a supply oriented environment, i.e. more exclusive and is more lenient towards the service provider, the series entering popular and mass culture bring about important changes in the supply structure of production, with increasing demand pressure and consumer expectations. While the above findings do not bear great novelty value in economic terms per se, the context of their manifestation indeed does so: the fact that similar findings can be made from user-generated internet memes can confer this medium a **market prediction function**.

As in society as a whole, "average consumers" are the largest group of consumers that connects nonconsuming outsiders with small added value to the community and the elite made out here by book fans. This group of consumers is the one that presumably met the



Game of Thrones universe through the tv series. Based on the content classified into this group, there are consumers who have just become involved in following the series (Figure 24/a), while other consumers belongs to early series viewers.

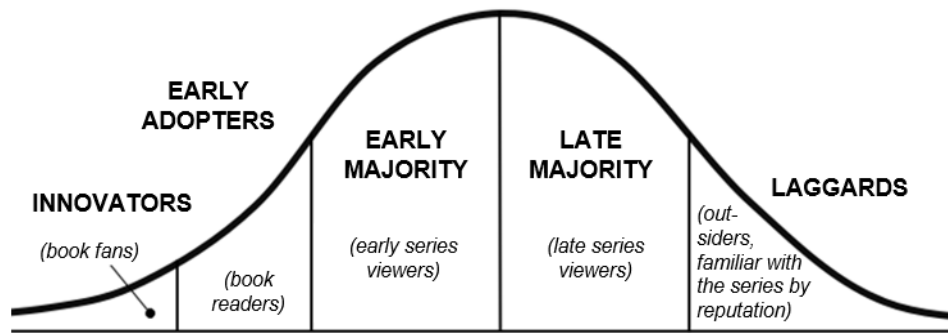
While outsiders might consider the series and its presence in public discourse as a nuisance and fans might consider their consumption as a lifestyle, the "majority society" seems to follow the series for its enjoyment value (Figure 24). In this situation, considering consumers' **limited discretionary time**, the series is in direct competition in a wider context with other leisure activities and with other television series in a narrow context. In this competitive situation, **delighters** (see Chapter 2.1) are important in consumers deciding in favor of one or the other series, and in the long run, in leading to brand loyalty.

**Figure 24. "Majority society": Followers of the tv series in the sample**



In categorizing content consumers, creators of creative contents related to their consumption (i.e. prosumers), one can take into account their presumable role in the reception and diffusion of information. Along this criterion, it is possible to draw up a parallel with the groups defined in Rogers's (1962) theory of innovation adoption (Figure 25).

Figure 25. Innovation curve of the consumption of the Song of Ice and Fire / Game of Thrones series



Source: Own elaboration, based on Rogers (1962)

According to Busse and Gray (2011), fans play a particularly important role in an audience as early adopters by determining and disseminating behavioral patterns related to the consumption of a content. In this respect, the group identified in our sample as book fans can be considered an important pillar of the diffusion of the Game of Thrones brand, as these content creators can be assumed members of a group of those consumers aware of the series prior to its tv premiere in 2011. Peer consumers with an information superiority are an obvious channel of **education** (Figure 26) of other consumers about the series, its plot, e.g. by explicating a complex plot that is necessarily more limited in scope in the tv show than in the books, thereby serving the eager audiences with useful extensions and thus contributing to the common interpretation of the message.

Figure 26. Education of users through memes

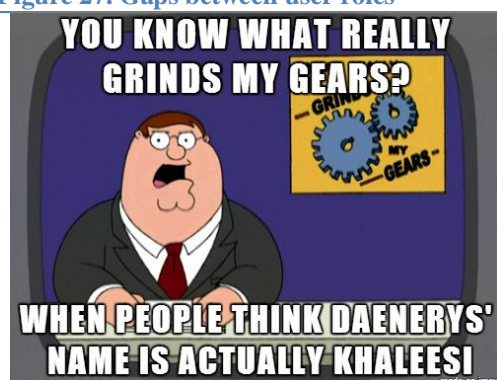


(a) RES\_154

(b) RES\_063

However, it is important to take into account the **personal gratifications** (Shao, 2009) related to this group of users: for example, if the sense of elitism coming from information superiority prevails over altruistic motivations of sharing information with others, then the social dimensions of education are marginalized and/or ascribed to other grounds. It is also important to note that there is a large gap in the sample between contents categorized as outsiders (laggards) and fans (innovators, early and late adopters). As the series can undeniably be considered part of mass culture with a mass audiences, laggards will be considered by innovators as "ignorants" (Figure 27), who overrun the network with theories, interpretations and misinterpretations and even confusions (e.g. confusing the elements of the Game of Thrones series with other similar series<sup>34</sup>) often frustrating to adepts (e.g. Figure 14/f). A wide knowledge gap is then sign of tension between consumers, that are actually expressed through the contents analyzed in the sample.

**Figure 27. Gaps between user roles**



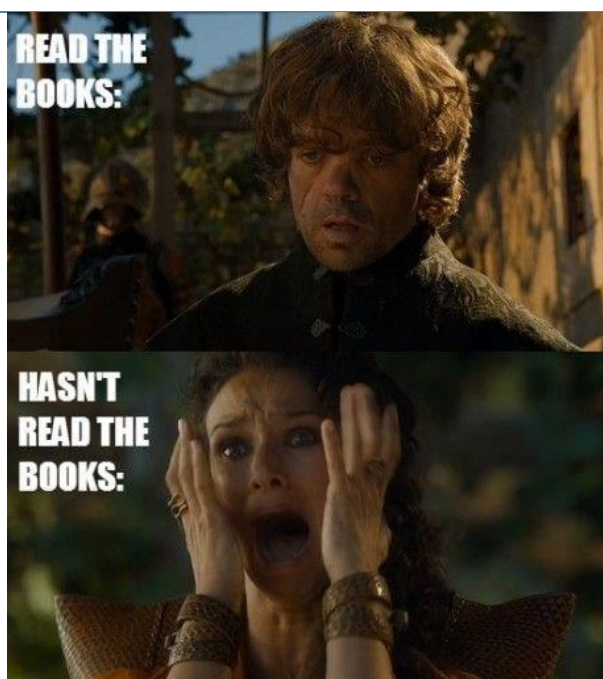
(a) RES\_093

*"I've been waiting for this episode for a while. I'm just going to make some popcorn and stare at my facebook feed blow up during the hour that follows."*

*"I'm sad I don't know many people who haven't read the books ): I wanna see people go apeshit...."*

*"My coworker doesn't know. Monday will be a happy day."*

(b) RES\_068: excerpts from the user-generated comments to the above meme (Source: Reddit)



(c) X\_033

Therefore, the knowledge transfer that is observable within our sample is rather incremental, similarly to technological innovations, leading to a social/community stratification. Thus, consumer groups close to each other can be more effective in

<sup>34</sup> see e.g. Chapter 8.1.'s title (although here a consciously made confusion), or Figure 14/f.

interactions: viewers with a superficial knowledge of the universe are more likely to play a role in educating outsiders, while the former group is more likely to be further educated by early fans. According to our results, the **involvement** of less active users takes two identified patterns. First, between book fans and viewers of the series and second, between viewers and outsiders, who are unaware of the series. In this perspective, the messages that can be observed in a pool of memes with supposedly universal message show a division into numerous target groups.

Memes as consumer-generated contents can play an important role in information diffusion as well towards new consumers as towards maintaining community discussion and thereby a group dynamic among existing consumers. The main factors identified in the shaping of group dynamics among fans are:

- various rhetorical elements as elements of style,
- user creations facilitating a common understanding,
- fan fiction (in a broad sense) as a manifestation of personal interpretations,
- fans' meaning-appropriation.

Identified rhetorical elements include rhetorical questions, questions directly addressing the community or the audience at large, as well as calling the audience for action (e.g. Figure 28/a). Using one of the outside meme templates mentioned beforehand can be considered an example of education rhetoric: rendering a text and message related to the Game of Thrones universe to a meaningful set of symbols (i.e. the implicit meaning of one or the other meme template, for which a prior cultural knowledge is required) with meaning to a community of consumers can facilitate a wider understanding of a message.



Figure 28. Motivational factors of consumption



Browse Video > TV shows

Type	Name (Order by: Uploaded, Size, Uled by, SE, LE)	SE	LE
Video (TV shows)	Game of Thrones S03E09 HDTV x264-EVOLVE [eztv] 👤👍👎 Uploaded 06-03 04:36, Size 329.84 MB, Uled by eztv	36804	1906
Video (TV shows)	Game of Thrones S03E08 HDTV x264-EVOLVE[ettv] 👤👍👎 Uploaded 05-25 04:04, Size 358.07 MB, Uled by ettv	15033	652
Video (TV shows)	Game of Thrones S03E07 HDTV x264-2HD [eztv] 👤👍👎 Uploaded 05-13 04:27, Size 443.29 MB, Uled by eztv	11693	653
Video (TV shows)	Game of Thrones S03E06 HDTV x264-2HD [eztv] 👤👍👎 Uploaded 05-06 04:10, Size 369.73 MB, Uled by eztv	10543	611
Video (TV shows)	Hannibal S01E11 HDTV x264-LOL [eztv] 👤👍👎 Uploaded 1-day 05:44, Size 195.57 MB, Uled by eztv	9751	2986
Video (TV shows)	Game of Thrones S03E01 HDTV x264-2HD [eztv] 👤👍👎 Uploaded 04-01 04:10, Size 385.94 MB, Uled by eztv	6997	405
Video (TV shows)	The Big Bang Theory S06E24 HDTV x264-LOL [eztv] 👤👍👎 Uploaded 05-17 04:28, Size 162.78 MB, Uled by eztv	6967	139
Video (TV shows)	Game of Thrones S03E05 HDTV x264-2HD [eztv] 👤👍👎 Uploaded 04-29 04:22, Size 406.45 MB, Uled by eztv	6855	484
Video (TV shows)	Burn Notice S07E01 HDTV x264-ASAP [eztv] 👤👍👎 Uploaded 1-day 04:39, Size 322.04 MB, Uled by eztv	6104	1237
Video (TV shows)	Game of Thrones S03E03 HDTV x264-EVOLVE [eztv] 👤👍👎 Uploaded 04-15 04:11, Size 366.29 MB, Uled by eztv	6143	381
Video (TV shows)	Game of Thrones S03E04 HDTV x264-EVOLVE[ettv] 👤👍👎 Uploaded 04-22 04:01, Size 391.37 MB, Uled by ettv	6045	379
Video (TV shows)	Game of Thrones S03E02 HDTV x264-2HD[ettv] 👤👍👎 Uploaded 04-08 04:27, Size 478.4 MB, Uled by ettv	5985	365



(a) 9GG\_51



(b) X\_123

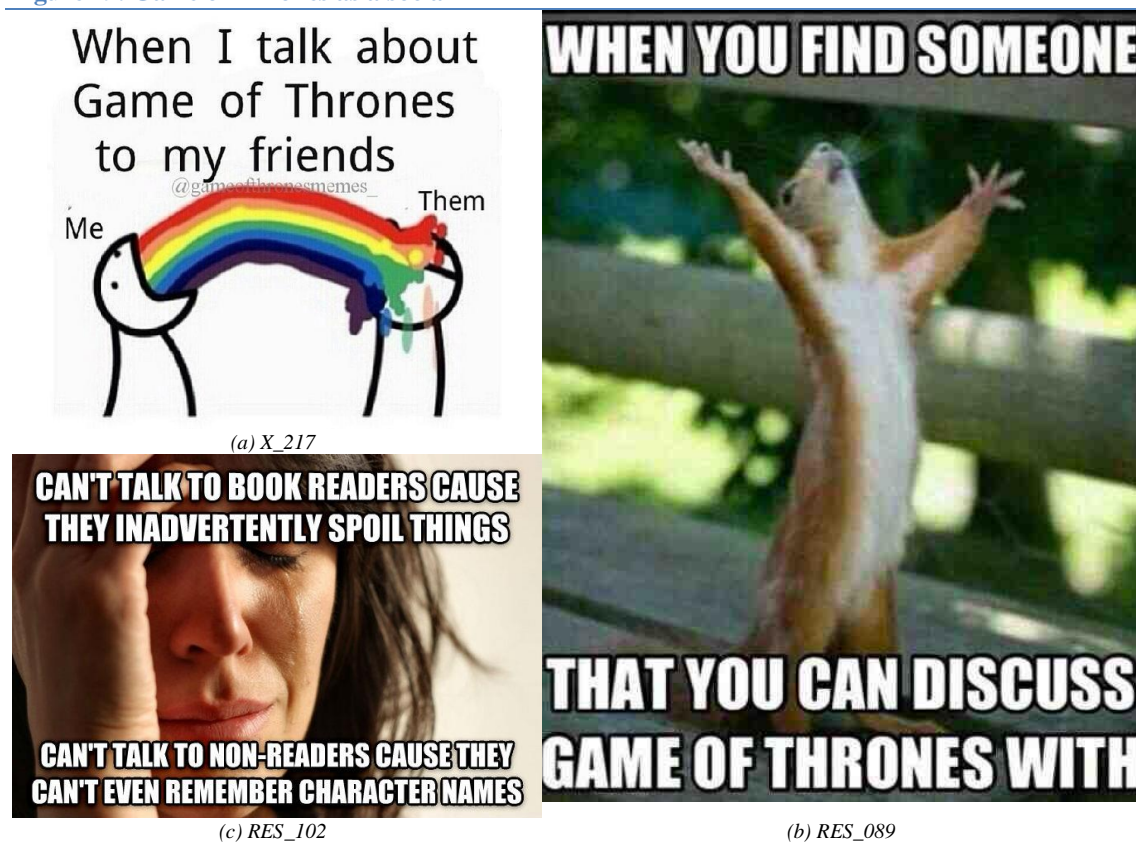


(c) X\_105

In addition to user education, users' involvement may include elements like an emphasis on product benefits or a continued media presence. Internet memes can act as complements, and in some cases, substitutes for the brand's media presence (see e.g. Annex 1, X\_014-036, and X\_037-048), in the sense that they can be considered imprints of active consumer interest and presence in consumer conversations. Product benefits coming from users (i.e. meme creators) perceived as peers can be considered as consumer recommendations (Paek et al., 2011), thereby contributing to **generating demand**. The perceived popularity of the series (Figure 28/a) might arouse a frustration of alienation in the group of laggards. During browsing on the internet, the massive earned media of the series (and internet memes about it among them), can easily overwhelm users, prompting a sentiment of 'fear of missing out' (Przybylski et al., 2013) (Figure 28/c), which in turn can provoke consumption.

Game of Thrones as a topic of conversation triggered by the continued media presence can be considered as a social integrator and generating internet memes in the topic can itself be considered a personal gratification related to social interactions (Hawkins et al. 1992 in Hofmeister-Tóth, 2003) (cf. „linking value (Cova – Cova, 2002)). A consumer of the series is happy to be able to converse about their series (Figure 29/a) and frustrated if they are not (Figure 29/b-c).

**Figure 29. Game of Thrones as a social link**



Joint consumption is another social function related to fandom represented in internet memes. According to the related images in the sample, the experience gained from joint consumption is greater than the sum of individual utilities.

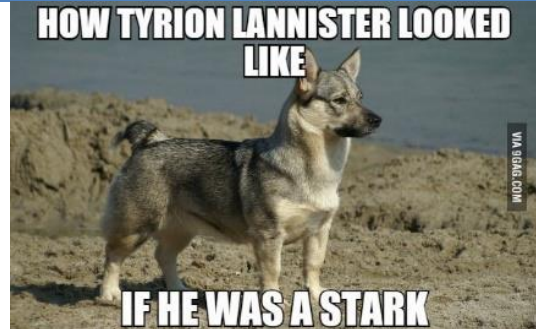
The social function equally manifests itself by the appearance of **inside jokes** (Figure 30/c), the dissemination of which within the groups and among various groups can be regarded as an element of group **cohesion**, where the context of a creative content can often go beyond that of the plot of the series. This is how, for example, representations of

user interpretations of the Game of Thrones universe get to include outside elements, like media or commercial brands (see Chapter 8.3.5).

**Figure 30. Examples of inside jokes**



(a) R RES\_153 (reference to the famous “one does not simply walk into Mordor” phrase from the Lord of the Rings, mixed with a reference to the warg [skinchanger] characters in the Game of Thrones who can warg into living beings, mainly animals. In the story, Bran Stark, himself a warg manages to warg into his simple-minded friend, Hodor)



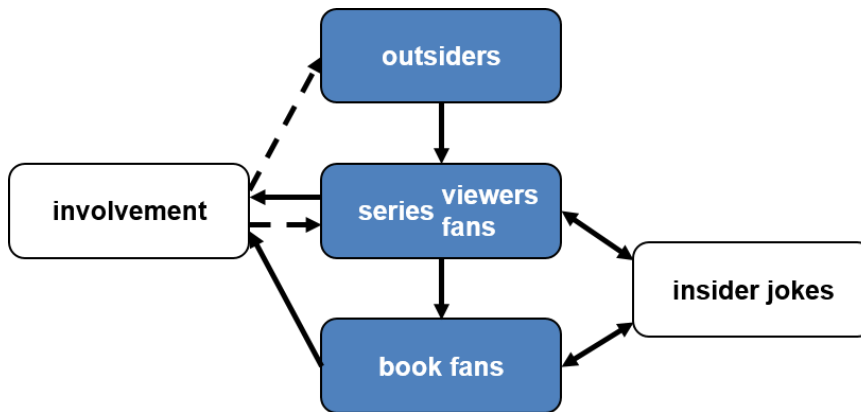
(b) X\_005 (reference to the dwarf character of Tyrion Lannister and House Stark, whose sigil animal is a wolf)



(c) RES\_106 (reference to the words of house Greyjoy [“We do not saw”])

Our observations on group dynamics are summarized in Figure 31.

**Figure 31. Group dynamics and value creation processes based on meme messages**



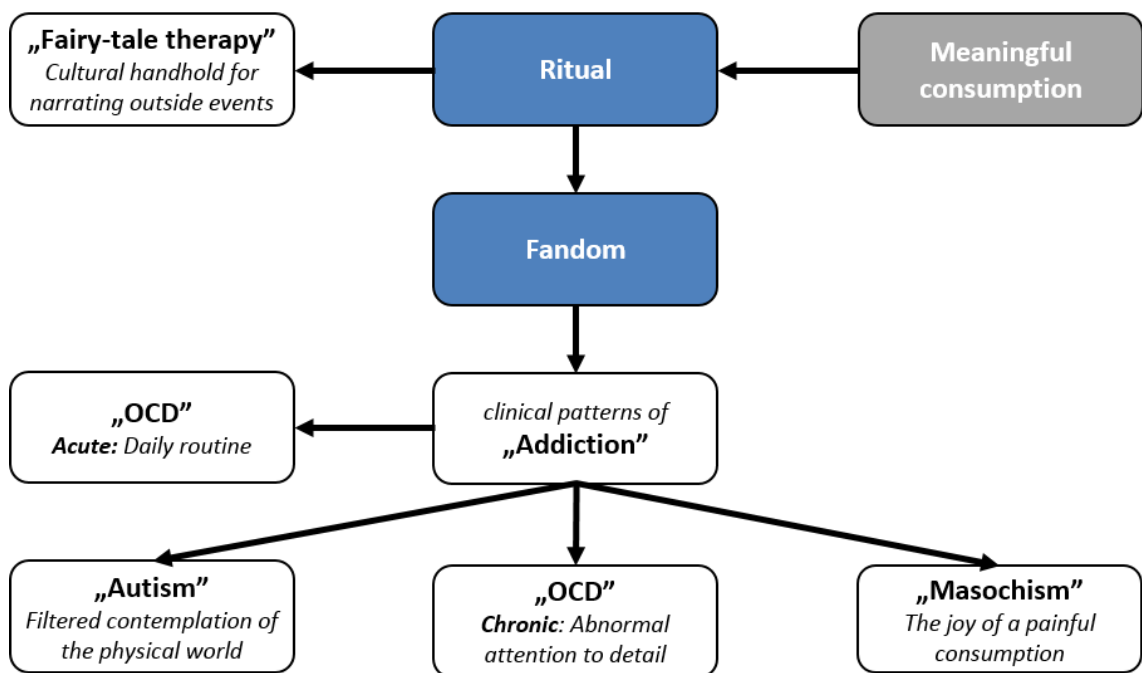
#### **8.3.4. Consumer meanings and dimensions of perceived consumer value**

Our results highlight the fact that the consumption of the Game of Thrones series is not a mere time-filler, rather a meaningful activity for the active users participating in the meme creation process.

In the following we present the identified levels and dimensions of consumer value creation along the analytical metaphor of a "psychoanalysis" (Figure 32). While not intended as a real psychoanalysis, this metaphor as an expressive framework was chosen for our results show a certain similarity of the patterns related to the consumption of the series (as suggested by the contents of the analyzed internet memes) and certain psychiatric symptoms (as referred to in colloquial ways and situations).



Figure 32. “Psychoanalysis of memes”: Patterns of consumer value creation in the sample



A characteristic feature of fast-spreading internet memes is to reflect on current events and phenomena that affect the lives of a wider target audience in a given moment. According to Wiggins and Bowers's (2014) typology, these can be referred to as emergent memes. Because of their narrow context, these hardly ever become genuine memes, and with the fading topicality of the phenomenon they reflect to, they equally become outdated and lose their *raison d'être*. By using meme templates that are already in a genuine meme status, the opposite happens: creative "bricoleurs" (Horváth et al., 2014) start building new context around contents that are in a more mature phase or possibly even in a phase of appeasement, but with more universal meanings. This however acts against the wearing out of the meme by reinforcing its universality. At the same time, the current and topical message is offered a new channel of transmission for a wider audience, through the original context of the used meme template. Memes in the category dubbed **“fairy-tale therapy”** give a personal reflection to a current event or phenomenon that affects the lives of a wider group of people, using the framework of the creative elements of the Game of Thrones universe, which functions here as a cultural handhold. Fairy-tale therapy helps couching viewpoints and opinions on wider social matter in a lighter context. For example, juxtaposing stills taken out from the series with pictures of public figures gives way to expressing political opinion, the same way as projecting key moments of the series's plot to actual events in world politics can give a satirical charge

to these latter (e.g. item ML\_132 in the sample bears the "Kim in the North" catchphrase with the face of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un photoshopped to the typical representation of a Northerner from the series in the accompanying image).

Besides deeper social issues, the category of fairy-tale therapy equally includes the representations in the context of the Game of Thrones universe of rituals related to the audience's everyday life. For example, the "Not today" emergent meme mentioned earlier can be used as a channel for linking the series with various tasks awaiting the target audience, like – for instance – updating one's Widows operating system (Figure 17/b).

**Figure 33. “fairy-tale therapy” in memes: Game of Thrones memes and present-day political facts**



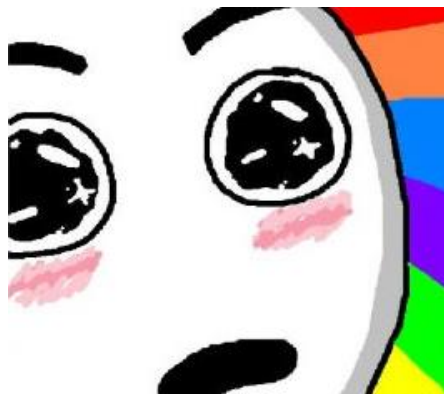
ML\_036: „Game of American Thrones”: Game of Thrones characters used in political satire

The meaningfulness of the series is revealed via **rituals** that express an increased emotional involvement. Rituals can further be subdivided into the categories of a deeper manifestation of fandom related to the series and that of user narratives by means of creative elements taken from the series.

Fandom can be characterized by an active involvement. Contents that were classified into this category have the fact in common that meme creators leave the reality of the physical world behind show an **escapist** (Bényei, 2011) pattern of consumption by putting the Game of Thrones universe forward in their lives for a certain time (Figure 34/d). Consumer manifestations that were classified under the category of fandom show

elements of admiration, fascination (i.e. *delight*) and even addiction. This latter implies that not only it is a meaningful and prioritized consumption, but can function – based to some indications in the sample – as a *drug* (Figure 34/a-c).

**Figure 34. Awe, delight and drugs**



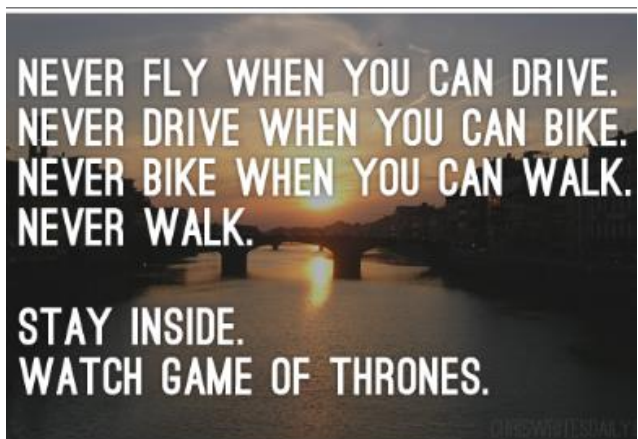
(a) 9GG\_85 (excerpt): awe



(b) 9GG\_09: drugs



(c) X\_098: delight



(d) X\_244: a way of life

In their life cycle model of memes, Horváth et al. (2014) define the second phase dubbed "transformation" as the connecting of unrelated thing and the making of unusual connections. One separate and deeper identified dimension of fandom is the extension of one's admiration to the physical world, by watching the world through the elements of Game of Thrones. This is the reason why this activity was compared to the condition of "**autism**". This category has produced quite a lot of manifestations in the sample.

One can classify user echoes of physical manifestations with direct connection to the series into a milder form of this category. User images of Starbucks units with Game of Thrones-inspired billboards to be further discussed later are one similar case. External

stimuli that creators of internet memes associate with characters and/or plot elements of the series is another level of projecting the series into the physical world. In extreme cases, avid consumers can associate to the series at this level from the shape of a random animal (e.g. RES\_057) or even a tree (e.g. RES\_072), just like from a somewhat related graffiti (e.g. ML\_073; X\_197), vehicle registration plate or bumper sticker (ML\_029; ML\_121; RES\_197), or from seeing names that loosely resemble meaningful names related to the series. Thus way, avid and judicious fans do not simply walk past a Frey's Hotel in Stockholm (RES\_146), a funeral home called Frey (RES\_173) or a John Snow pub in London (RES\_119), without making an association to the series. More, a statue representing the Roman emperor Caligula can serve as a base for an internet meme just by dint of resembling the actor playing an evil character in the series (RES\_193). Also, a case for an interesting brand association is when an observant fan seems to notice characters of the series on a out-of-home advertisement for a German DIY shop (Hagebaumarkt) (9GG\_43) thus appropriating the original message of the advertiser to their own (fan) purposes.

Another interesting physical appearance of fandom is the supporter group<sup>35</sup> of Racing Santander soccer team from Northern Spain which used a motto in direct connection with the Game of Thrones series ("Rey en el norte", i.e. "King in the North") (ML\_145) with a meaning related to their own activity and expression of fandom, contributing to the institutionalization of a meaning association, itself contributing to the diffusion and survival of a meme.

Two levels of “**obsessive–compulsive disorder**” were identified in the sample: an acute, and a chronic form. In the category dubbed the “acute” form of “obsessive–compulsive disorder” the series equally becomes the basis of various community rituals. This category includes the manifestations of addiction to the series, characterized by user manifestation of "binge viewing" <sup>3637</sup>, or series-related games invented by consumers, e.g. a version of the famous Guess Who game with characters from the Game of Thrones series, a chess game with special rules, or a Game of Thrones drinking game. More, the

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<sup>35</sup> which itself is a peculiar fan community

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.sorozatjunkie.hu/2006/09/29/alapveto-fogalmak-daralas/>, Accessed: May 1, 2015.

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.nlcafe.hu/szabadido/20140221/rohamtevezes-fuggoseg/>, Accessed: May 1, 2015.



genuine meme status of the series is represented by the fact that even Game of Thrones-related pickup lines were invented (X\_235).

In its “chronic” form, users seem to project themselves into the story with their whole personality. Various elements of group dynamics mentioned earlier equally pertain to this category, like the elitism of book fans, and their attention to detail in particular. The joy and sharing of identified contradictions between the books and the tv series, as well as between various parts of the tv series likely provides meme creators with a "eureka effect" and helps dealing with the frustration related to the consumption of the series. Overall, it offers a gratifying experience (Shao, 2009).

Judicious and engaged (and therefore critical) fans can echo a representation of **service quality** through their creations. The perceived service quality gaps in the sample are illustrated through Parasuraman et al.'s (1985) model in Annex 2 (Figure 42).

The **expected service – perceived service gap** is continuously present in the context of the series, since (as mentioned beforehand) it operates with an idiosyncratic narrative style (e.g. the particularly cruel death cases to which even main characters are no exception) (Figure 42/5).

Even if a film adaptation of a narrative with pre-determined twists can barely be considered consumer-focused, the **perception gap** still appears in the context as the book series was unfinished in the moment of its porting to television. The negative user-generated images sometimes bordering antibranding concerning the author, George R. R. Martin's character can be categorized here. This is further reinforced by the fact that consumers by definition are often unable to properly formulate their needs. In case of media products (unlike other products) reducing cognitive dissonance might not be a goal of primordial importance: this – in the present case – can lead to consumption becoming somewhat of a masochistic experience. On the contrary, the numerous unexpected turns offered by the series do in fact contribute to consumers' enjoyment value, even if that entails the death of some characters beloved by the audience.

The **service quality specifications gap** includes elements like tv channels' programming activities. An example to that is AMC's Walking Dead series, actively present in our sample in the form of oppositional brand loyalty, that was once programmed by the

channel in parallel with HBO's Game of Thrones, leading to the triumph of this latter. With a different programming strategy, however, both contents might have been consumer by the overlapping target groups.

The **service delivery gap** displays the differences between a service provider's goals and content consumers' perceived dimensions of engagement. While providing a media service is a complex activity, the consumption of content by the audience often takes place along strong heuristics and in a strong emotional context: in the "moment of truth", i.e. during content consumption, factors that can be referred to as delighters will be those that would nail a target group to the screen (or not). The example shown in Figure 42/3 illustrates one such consumption heuristic, where the presence of a complex storytelling, intriguing characters or conflicts can be overshadowed in the eye of some consumers by the presence of R-rated contents.

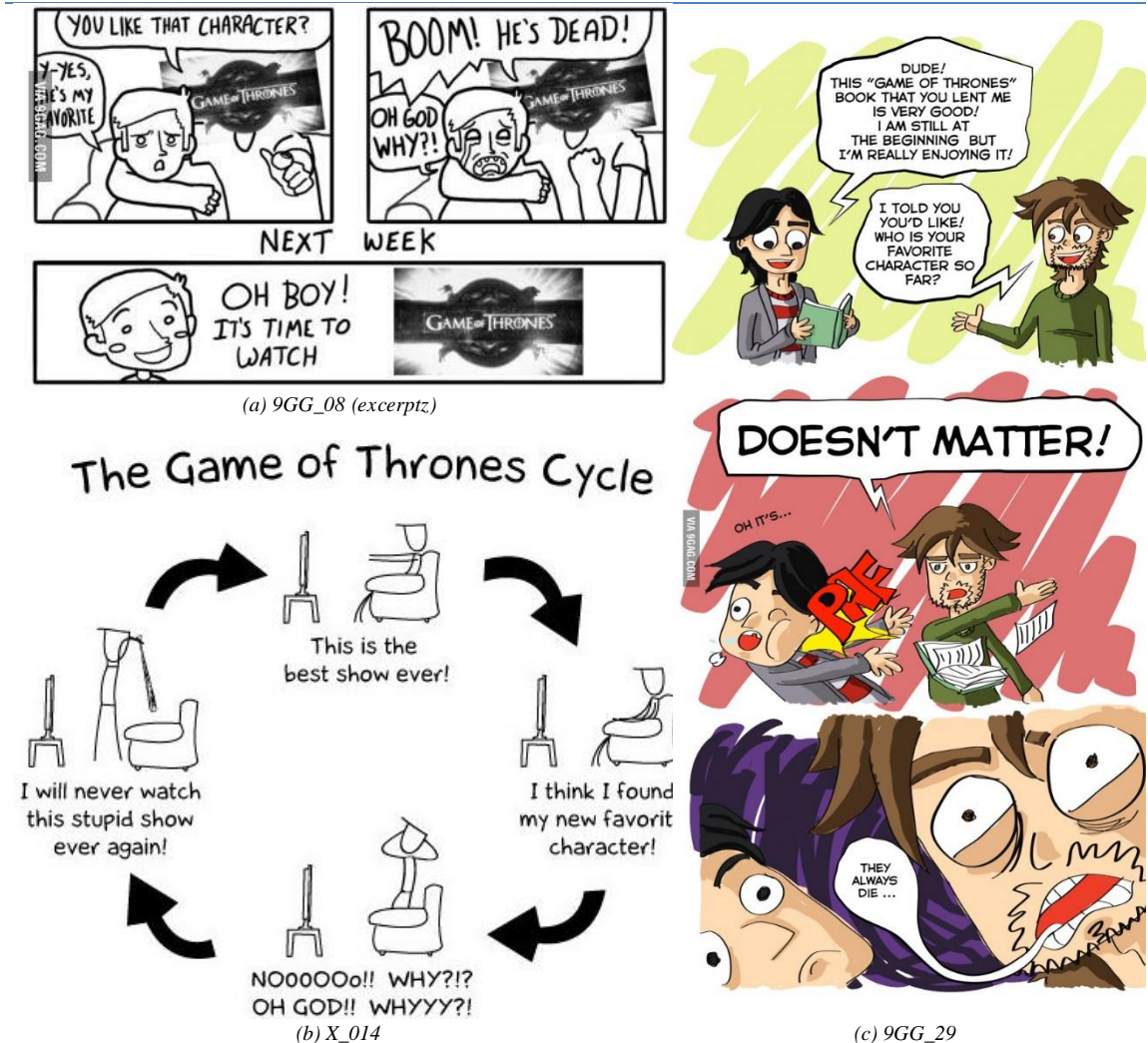
Another example to the service delivery gap can be the perceived unnecessary changes recognized and disliked by the audience. Thus for example a change of actor for a character during between-seasons (X\_208), various plot holes (X\_061) or recalling past sins of characters that have undergone a positive character development (and have become sympathetic to the audience) are all illustrations of a service delivery gap perceived by the audience.

Finally, the **communications gap** can equally be traced back to the series' masochistic consumption pattern. Due to the lack of information, new consumers are unprepared for the idiosyncratic elements of the series (e.g. its brutality). Seeing the large number of committed content consumers, a user might perceive the series as a "traditional" piece of mass entertainment. The actual service will inevitably be in contradiction with this perception, thus causing the first shock for the newly acquired consumer of the series.

The consumption of Game of Thrones for many meme creators seems to amount as a **masochistic experience** (Figure 35/a). As seen in the context of service gaps, the idiosyncratic storytelling, characterized by the unexpected and brutal elements in the progression of the plot can be considered a delighter according to the memes in the sample. The initial consternation and shock gives way to a generally pleasant and gratifying content consumption (thus leading to a cognitive dissonance), which itself turns

into cyclic consumption pattern (Figure 35/b), making unexpectedness a requirement (or, as shown in Figure 1, a satisfier). As a consequence the consumer of the series might gradually become cynical (Figure 35/c).

**Figure 35. The Game of Thrones experiencescape: Shock, cognitive dissonance, cynicism**



### 8.3.5. Brands in the Game of Thrones universe

A main marketing contribution of our study is the review of the presence and role of brands in the environment of internet memes based on the fantasy universe of the Game of Thrones series.

A relevant starting point for our study is the analysis of the Game of Thrones series as a brand. Various elements of brand identity (Kapferer, 2012) were mentioned in earlier parts of this chapter, to which the following section serves as an organized summary. Moreover, the sample contains numerous allusions to brands, otherwise unrelated to the

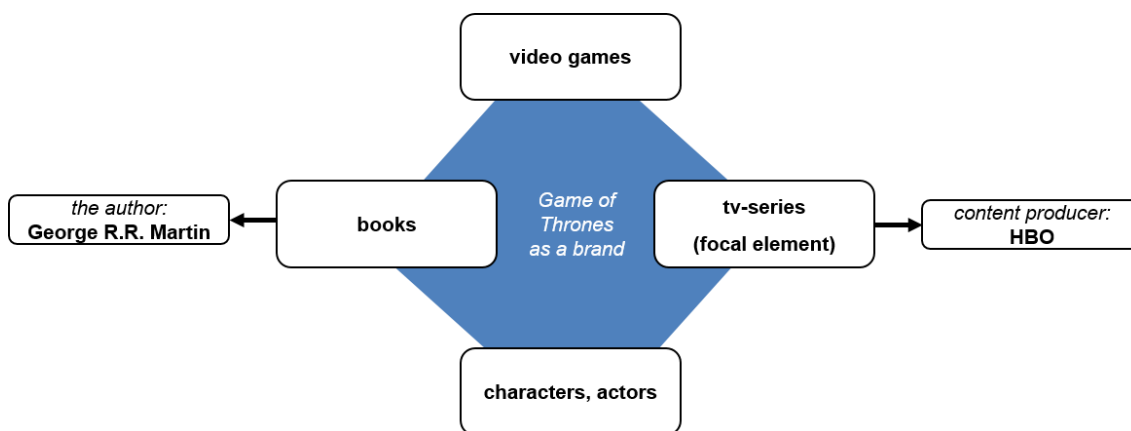
series. It became apparent during coding that it is worth distinguishing between media-related brands (e.g. other series, feature films, or tv channels) and consumer brands. These latter constitute the main focus of our analysis. The reason behind this is because this category is the farthest from direct and obvious brand effects that can be related to the memes in the sample. "Outside" brands thus appearing are not justified by the context of a fantasy environment, nor does this environment give place to conscious brand placement from the part of organizations. Such brand appearances are therefore are most likely the result of user brand associations and thus way a manifestation of brands' marketing and communication performance, channeled by the representations of consumer meanings.

### Game of Thrones as a brand

The core element of the Game of Thrones brand in the sample is the tv series. As seen beforehand, the development of the Game of Thrones meme is closely tied to the popularity of the tv series. For this reason, one can assume that the main beneficiary of any thus generated evolution of brand equity is the organization owning the film rights, namely HBO.

A direct manifestation of this central role is the use in internet memes of various visual elements taken from the tv series (see Annex 1).

**Figure 36. The Game of Thrones brand**



Moreover, it is apparent from the sample that another important building block of the Game of Thrones brand equity is the actors, with a number of sample elements praising them. One of the most outstanding actors of the series based on the content analysis is Peter Dinklage (in the role of Tyrion Lannister). His playing a dwarf who uses his wit and intellect to overcome the prejudice he faces is so remarkable in the eyes of the meme-making audience of the sample that they demand through memes him be awarded with an Emmy (X\_094). Also, a buzz and hatred in public discourse around an evil character of a series can be considered an indirect measure of performance of an actor playing a negative character. As best formulated in a meme about actor Jack Gleeson playing the character of Joffrey, "if you hated the character, it means that the actor did a great job" (X\_219).

As mentioned previously, writer George R.R. Martin himself is a character of a meme template, through which consumers of the series are enabled to indulge their frustrations accumulated through experiencing the brutal events of the series. Although it can be said that these creations in the sample are particularly heated, it is noteworthy to mention, based on our analysis so far, that their seriousness needs to be evaluated with reservation: these user creations as a meme seem more like a **virtual stress ball**, through which it is fashionable for avid consumers to hate the author. The common enemy might then even reinforce fans' social cohesion. The author himself plays up this ambiguous love-hate relationship of interdependence with his fans in his self-branding and media appearances. The cult status of the author being a butcher is such a central element of fan manifestations about him in the sample that it even appears in connection with other series and events when something unexpected happens there. This inside joke can be considered a manifestation of what we previously called a delighter of the series, causing consumers' making of an instant association to the Game of Thrones series in outside situations (e.g. the sudden death of a character, as if George R.R. Martin had written it – X\_137).

As mentioned beforehand, starring cast members' other roles are a fine trigger of intertextuality for meme generating audiences. Attentive consumers notice and make use of these appearances in creatively formulating their own meanings. This user activity can profit to the Game of Thrones brand in users' contributing to the subsistence and thus slowing the wearing out of the meme by offering ever new contexts and meanings to it, which in turn appear in consumer discussions.

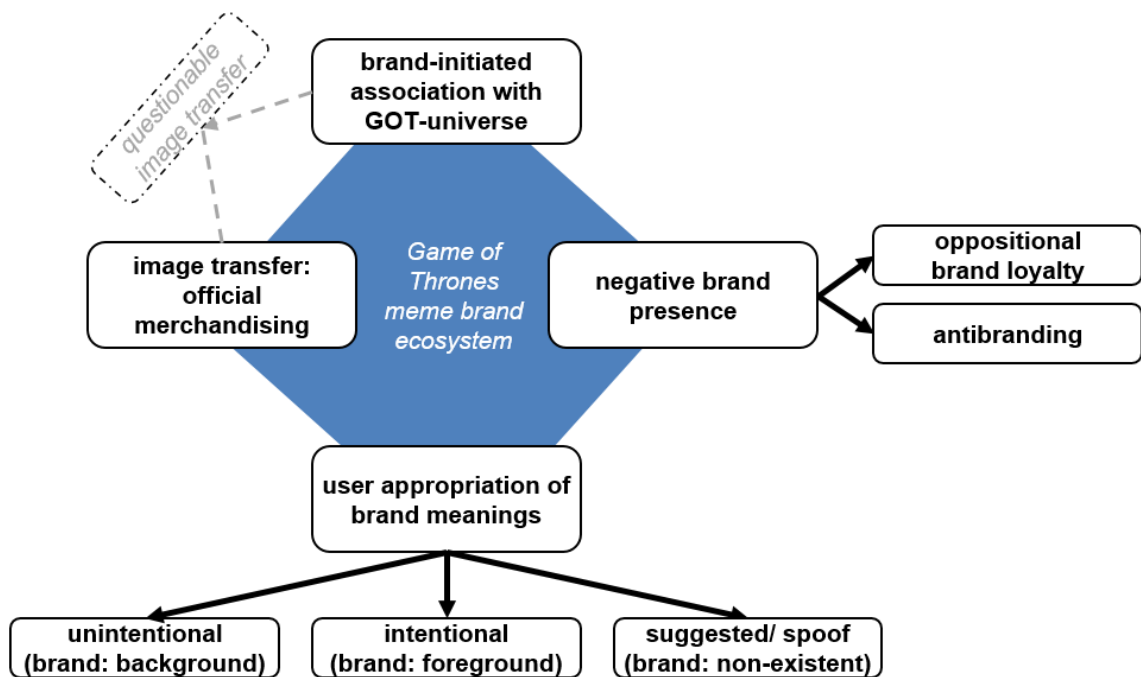
Fan creativity and capability for abstraction is present through serendipity. Numerous examples of intertextuality can be found in the sample where seemingly random hooks are used as links between the series and outside elements. One example to this is the link between the Game of Thrones and the Iron Man series. The two works only have in common the surname of their main characters: the main character of the Iron Man series is called Tony Stark (played in the movie adaptations by actor Robert Downey Jr.), while House Stark is one of the Great Houses in the Game of Thrones series. This link is enough for a few members of the audience to generate numerous mashups of the two series (e.g. ML\_004; ML\_126; X\_159), thus contributing to keeping both series in the foreground in an entertaining way. Another similar example, although more limited in scope, of a surname used as a source of intertextuality is House Bolton (linked by a creator to singer Michael Bolton – RES\_186).

Interestingly, the Game of Thrones video games hardly appear in our sample as carriers in internet memes of the brand. This is even more surprising in the light of the fact that video games otherwise are indeed present in the sample, with titles that do not have direct thematic connections with the series (Table 12). Following the prior assumption that memes are somewhat of a representation of a brand's success as a brand, this observation can lead to think that HBO, owner of the film rights to the series, still needs to focus on the development of this part of its transmedia storytelling strategy. Even though a few video games have seen the day in the past few years with the Game of Thrones universe as a base (based on both the novels only and the tv series), none of which has been able to create a breakthrough in the arena of video games. Even though at the moment of the elaboration of the present dissertation the newest works based on the series have already received extensive media coverage and have been equally critically acclaimed and a commercial success, there is no sign of them as of yet in the user-generated earned media, as represented here by our sample.

### Commercial brands in the Game of Thrones memes

The research sample contains a surprisingly high amount of elements that were related to commercial brands, either putting them into their focus, making a reference to them or otherwise using them to pass along a personal message. The thus emerging “meme brand ecosystem” is illustrated in Figure 37.

Figure 37. Game of Thrones meme brand ecosystem



We organized the commercial brands appearing in the sample into four categories: (1) brand-initiated brand presence, presence through a (2) user appropriation of brand meanings, (3) negative brand presence, and (4) merchandising.

As mentioned beforehand, brands appearing in user-generated contents can be considered in itself a performance of a prior marketing communications and branding activity of the organization. The analysis of brand presence in the sample of Game of Thrones memes supplements this view with two remarks. Within **brand-initiated presence** one could identify brand meanings of Game of Thrones and related social values appropriated by other commercial brands.

In many cases small businesses resorted to a more or less conscious **piggybacking** (Rowley, 2004) on the success of the series. In the sample, cases of meaning appropriation



to even the most profound level of business were discovered, like the **provocative choice of brand name**: this is the case with a restaurant named Khaleesi's (located in Mission, TX<sup>38</sup>), which is likely to have been brought to the attention to the audience of Game of Thrones memes by a photography taken by one watchful user. Another strategy, followed in the sample by a small restaurant, Vinnie's Pizza (Brooklyn, New York, NY) and one (or more) outlet of the Starbucks coffeehouse chain is to build on **a shared inside joke with the consumers**. These brands contributed to the extension of the Game of Thrones meme universe by creating hand-made branded drawings on boards physically present in their respective outlets. While in the case of Starbucks, it is likely that the creativity of these outlets was shared digitally by visiting fans, the pizza joint consciously shared their works with the audience on their website. The case of Vinnie's Pizza highlights the opportunities in the fashionable activity of content marketing for small businesses (for more in detail see e.g. Csordás – Gáti, 2014). By uploading as a spare time activity various images of drawings with numerous pop cultural connotations on boards physically present in the pizza outlet (hence the play on words in the internet site's name<sup>39</sup>: "special bored / special boards") the management gives way to the extending the restaurants' fame to the fans of the various cultural works mentioned.

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.khaleesiskingdom.com/restaurant.html>, Accessed: Feb 28, 2015.

<sup>39</sup> <http://specialbored.tumblr.com>, Accessed: Feb 28, 2015.



Figure 38. Piggybacking on the success of the Game of Thrones brand – Shared inside jokes with customers



(a) ML\_082: Khaleesi's Restaurant



(b) ML\_020: Vinnie's Pizzeria



(c) X\_059: Starbucks

Another voluntary meaning appropriation conducted by an organization can be related to an official marketing communications campaign. A promotion of TNT's<sup>40</sup> new series entitled *Legends* in 2014 used the creative hook<sup>41</sup> (e.g. by using the internet hashtag #DontKillSeanBean) of lead actor Sean Bean often playing characters who die during a movie. The image in the sample can be considered as a **viral echo** of the campaign, present in the sample through a mashup with an emergent meme of the Game of Thrones universe, itself the result of user meaning-making and appropriation.

The sample of memes equally contains elements where **official merchandising** related to the series appears. Here appear, for example, the Iron Throne Blonde Ale (X\_249) produced by New York state-based Ommegang brewery with official license from HBO,

<sup>40</sup> an American cable television network that is owned by a division of Time Warner. HBO, owner of the tv rights to the Song of Ice and Fire novels, is itself another operating subsidiary of Time Warner.

<sup>41</sup> <http://time.com/3045528/dontkillseanbean-sean-bean-comic-con-tnt/>, Accessed: Feb 28, 2015.

or the 2013 Game of Cones contest of the best ice-cream shop organized by Foursquare in association with HBO. Other unofficial produces present in the sample were woven dragon eggs (ML\_042), or a surprising number of photos of cakes with a Game of Thrones theme (e.g. 9GG\_18; 9GG\_83; ML\_017). The appearance of beer brands invented by creative fans of the Game of Thrones universe strengthens the legitimacy of the existence of an official beer brand as much as they show additional brand extension opportunities.

**Table 12. Identified brands in the sample**

Type	Brand
HoReCa	<b>Starbucks</b> [7]; Domino's Pizza; KFC; McDonald's; Southern Fried Chicken Freys Hotel (Stockholm); John Snow Bar (London); Khaleesi's Restaurant (Mission, TX); Vinnie's Pizza (Brooklyn, New York, NY)
Other services	Racing Santander; Seaworld; West Seattle Nursery & Garden Centre
Financial services	<b>Mastercard</b> [5]; Visa [2]; American Express; Discover
FMCG	Dead Crow Beer; Halleroder; Heineken; Holsten; Ommegang Brewery; Dos Equis [2]; Coca-Cola [2]; Sprite; Kellogg's [3]; Nutella; Snickers Clairol; L'Oréal; Maybelline; Vaseline
Clothing	Snuggie [2]; Nike
Computer games	Grand Theft Auto [4]; Skyrim [3]; Minecraft [2]; Nintendo [2]; Diablo3; Fifa15; Sims; Spore; Starcraft
Content providers	<b>Facebook</b> [11]; <b>Twitter</b> [11]; Google [2]; Ancestry.com; Brazzers; Foursquare; Pornhub; Redtube; Science; The Pirate Bay; TNT; Youtube
ICT / Tele-communication	<b>Apple</b> [7]; AT&T [2]; Microsoft [2]; HP; Linux; Kickstarter
Other	Excedrin; Hagebaumarkt; Hasbro / Milton Bradley; Honda; Ikea; Lego; Ray-Ban; Subaru
<i>Total: 67 identified brands, 120 brand appearances in 98 memes</i>	

*Note: Most frequently appearing brands in bold.*

Brands appearing in the peculiar context of Game of Thrones can imply that these brands are part of the pool of most accepted and/or best known brands of the group of active Game of Thrones content creators.

One identifiable context where brands appear is general product usage situations, that can reflect a target group's consumption patterns. Thus, as can be seen from Table 12, many brands that appear several times in the sample can directly be related to meme creators' everyday consumption. For example, screenshots of Facebook or Twitter, or more generally, photoshopped stills of fictional characters' social media communications can be perceived as an imprint of the massive use of these channels by the audience. The

memes' fictional characters use Apple computers and iPhones photoshopped onto the pictures. This equally suggests the Apple brand being top-of-mind among the audience.

Moreover thematic links in memes allow for users to illustrate a generic product or service category with a concrete brand. The latter can equally be a sign of the top-of-mind status of a brand. Another sign of increased brand awareness is the conscious use of the elements of (or similar elements to) a brand's identity for the sake of one's message (Figure 39).

**Figure 39. Indirect brand appearances: Mixing elements of Game of Thrones with popular brand's identity elements**



(a) X\_089: KFC



(c) X\_089: McDonald's



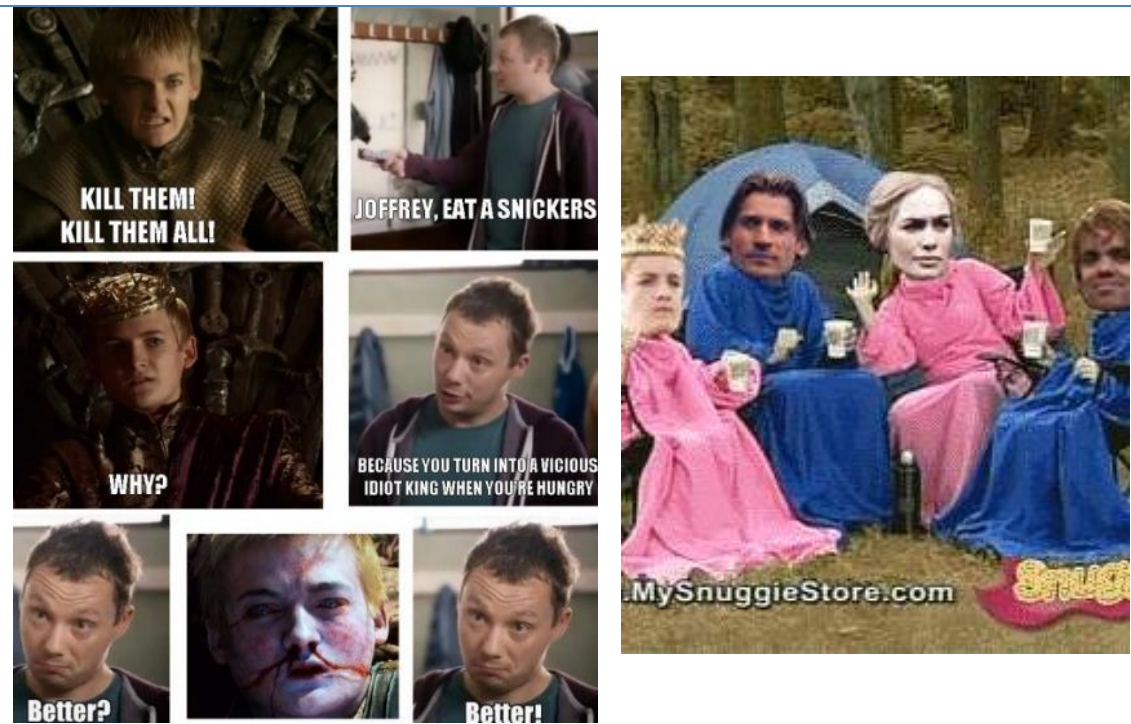
(b) X\_211: MasterCard



(b) X\_132: Starbucks

Finally, it is important to note that a community directly appropriating or adapting a brand's communication messages can contribute to the memefication of a brand message or the sustainment thereof (Figure 40).

Figure 40. Indirect brand appearances: Mixing elements of Game of Thrones with popular brand's advertisements



(a) ML\_316: Snickers

(b) X\_043: Parody of Snuggies TV-Shop ad

Creative hook (ad copy as a meme)

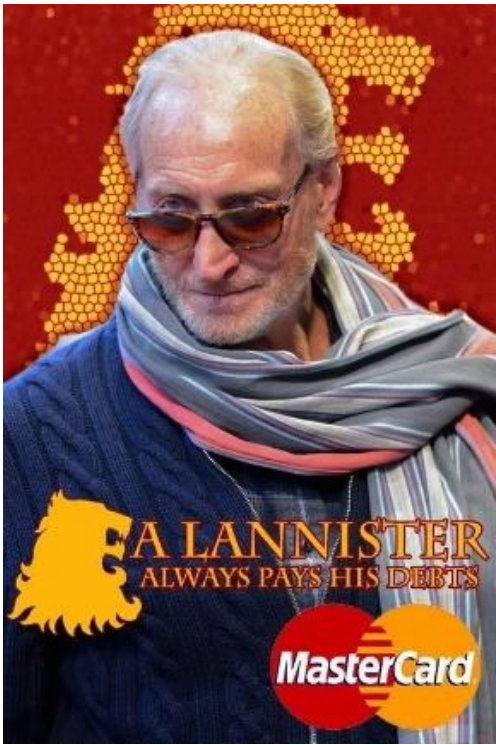
The brand most encountered in the sample was MasterCard with a highly thematic **association of ideas**. Here, MasterCard's memefied slogan "(There are some things money can't buy.) For everything else, there's MasterCard" is mixed by the creative audience with another memefied motto from the series ("A Lannister always pays his debts"). The relatively large number of appearances of the MasterCard association in the sample suggests that a successful emergent meme is taking shape (Figure 41).



Figure 41. A meme with a brand connection in the Game of Thrones universe: MasterCard



(a) ML\_150



(b) X\_039



You can't buy fatherly love.  
For everything else, there's ...

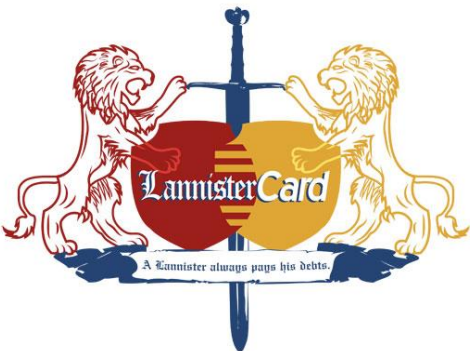


(c) X\_080

Select Payment Method

- ☒ Iron Price
- ☐ American Express
- ☐ DISCOVER
- ☐ MasterCard
- ☐ VISA

(d) X\_065



(e) X\_211

#### 8.4. Summary of the results, conclusions

Our research, despite the rigorous planning and sampling process suffers from the customary flaws of qualitative research: the results can only be interpreted in the given context. Even though the result cannot be generalized, the scrupulous description of the research planning and sampling processes enables further research to repeat our inquiry or even to extend it to other – similar – contexts. It is also possible for a future study to supplement a similar study of internet memes on a smaller sample with the observation of related user discussions. A complex content analysis might contribute to an even better understanding of the user meanings related to online user-generated visual contents and to the understanding of the immediate reactions they trigger.

The creators, senders and diffusers of internet memes (as those of all forms of user-generated content) are generally hard to identify. Therefore in our study we can only make indirect assumptions as to the personality traits of a sender of a message, their motivations, etc.

Users and consumers as active content creators can in themselves constitute a valuable target group for an organizations marketing (communications) activity, while the information appearing through the cultural artifacts they produce can serve as valuable marketing assets in the monitoring of a brand's social position.

In the study of consumer participation as a marketing communication tool we performed an analysis of the Game of Thrones meme ecosystem. User-generated content as cultural goods proved to be suitable for monitoring and collecting intelligence for both the focal brand (Game of Thrones) and other brands associated with the series' universe through user associations (RQ1).

Memes, as cultural goods with a wider audience offer for brands the possibility of additional brand encounters. Moreover, the experiential aspect of the consumption of primarily cultural goods makes it largely distinct from the actual situations of product or service consumption and therefore offers less formal brand encounters. At the same time user creativity and the related spontaneous associations can provide brand the monitor this ecosystem with countless pieces of latent market insight and intelligence (RQ2). One

scientific significance of the dissertation is the application of various traditional marketing models (e.g. the gaps model) in the evaluation of the consumer perception of value in an observational study of a qualitative sample of user-generated cultural artifacts. This result shows that similar approaches can be justified in marketing research (e.g. in connection with consumer culture theory research), in verifying related marketing models and results and observing latent or manifest consumer brand associations.

Memes often tend to essentialize, oversimplify and exaggerate the themes and topics they address. Internet memes are the imprint of a peculiar (simple, yet extremely expressive) representation of their generators' realities: while they are based on seized, spontaneous, unsolicited, but thereby authentic moments. These moments, when linked to a brand, can often paint a ruthless, even though instructive picture of the role that the brand in question occupies in the public eye, its consumer meanings, its legitimacy (RQ3; RQ4).

While one cannot relate internet memes to one given community, these contents can act as a postmodern social space, where a number of group dynamic functions and thereby a form of modern tribalism can be observed (RQ6). The peculiar language and widespread culture of internet memes (e.g. capturing noteworthy moments; making unusual associations; active creation and dissemination) make them suited to act as an alternative communication channel, which can be regarded as a kind of digital meta-communication system.

All in all, internet memes are an outstanding representation of consumer participation in the digital space. However, as cultural goods, receivers need to be in possession of certain cultural capital, that is, the awareness of the related cultural register(s). At the same time, it is worth noting that in the context of products or services, organizations equally have a role in educating their consumers thereby also facilitating the degree of involvement.

The participation in meme creation assumes a strong emotional involvement, that emphasize the role of delight and outrage in value creation (or destruction), instead of the more neutral satisfiers and dissatisfiers. This emotional charge can affect latent, tacit brand associations as well as service gaps, while the visual representations make them observable. As in many previous netnographies, group dynamics once again were found out to play a role, by letting users with strong ties to the brand (i.e. brand evangelists) play an important role in disseminating information and in educating other users, as well

as in protecting the brand against attacks by other users (with, for example, opposing brand loyalties) (RQ4; RQ5).

Proactive corporate communications are essential in the digital, many-to-many context where a brand presence can be reached through engaging in already existing relevant conversation in an honest, and if need be, self-critical manner. In exchange, the social space can function as a market prediction tool. This activity however requires a strategic approach from the organization with an emphasis on monitoring and learning, in order to unearth the core marketing sources of potential problems and respond accordingly, rather than using a sole mass communications approach.

User-generated content is perceived by users as an informal and unbiased communication space where brand presence is not forced, but organic, user-controlled and context-dependent. Similar brand encounters may contribute to an additional demand-generation function (by indirectly causing cognitive dissonance that the act of consumption may diminish) while the stimulated media presence can also contribute to raising consumption intensity. By reacting to the expressed needs and wants of various subcultural groups or neo-tribes through their content consumption activities, the digital channels allow organizations to become more easily part of users' everyday conversations and everyday life. All in all, compared to traditional mass media marketing communications, on one hand, this new environment comes with an increased level of responsibility for organizations, with, on the other hand, an increased yield potential.



# ANNEXES

## Annex 1. Research sample<sup>42</sup>

Id	URL (as of Feb 2, 2015)	commercial brand												picture text, or description [italic], or title [bold, italic]	Brand name
		media	brand	anti-branding, oppositional brand	ritual	meaning making	meaning	communication	theme	template	fan art [comics, drawings, scene from series]	insider joke	remix, mashup		
9gag (search:thrones, first 100 posts visioned & extracted) (Jan 26, 2015)															
9GG_01	http://9gag.com/gag/a3d9b37													<b>The Moment You Realize That Hodor Is A DJ In Real Life.</b>	
9GG_02	http://9gag.com/gag/amLjby											1		Before you kiss a boy / grab his waist / pull him closer to your body / look into his eyes / look at his lips while your biting yours / look back at his eyes again / grab his face gently / then slowly lean in and whisper into his ear: / "the lannisters send their regards" / then stab him in the chest whilst his mother watches / it 'll drive him crazy i promise	
9GG_03	http://9gag.com/gag/axb6obP													[A fake open letter explaining the Abundance of Death in Game of Thrones by George R. R. Martin / The author sets examples from other well-known books and novels to prove that he is not as cruel with his characters as many people say / Shakespeare kills most of his characters / Many characters in Game of Thrones are responsible for their death because they have made serious mistakes]	
9GG_04	http://9gag.com/gag/a6w8Pd8		1	1							1	1	1	What could be worse than Joffrey? / Oh...	Justin Bieber
9GG_05	http://9gag.com/gag/a8KEj9z													Boobs per episode of Game of Thrones / Average 5.6 boobs per episode	
9GG_06	http://9gag.com/gag/anx17X0										1			<b>Game of Thrones</b> [fan art]	
9GG_07	http://9gag.com/gag/a381614								1					Game of Thrones / y u no have more episodes	
9GG_08	http://9gag.com/gag/1316192				1					1				Oh boy! Its time to watch Game of Thrones! / Sup nerd, wanna see someone get murdered? No not really. / Oh god, soo much blood... Too bad. / You like that character? Y-yes he is my favourite. / Boom! He is dead! Oh god why?! / Don't worry, the bad guys will get what they deserve. Like overwhelming success + fortune. / Later geekwad. / Next week. Oh boy! Its time to watch Game of Thrones!	
9GG_09	http://9gag.com/gag/5791647				1					1				He can't die, he is the main character. / Right, now he's gonna escape.	
9GG_10	http://9gag.com/gag/1959230										1			Stay low! / Stay low? / And if youre lucky noone will notice you. / I was born lucky.	
9GG_11	http://9gag.com/gag/309311									1	1			Forever alone / Okay / Challenge accepted / FFFFFFFUUUUUUUUU / F*** YEA.	
9GG_12	http://9gag.com/gag/159619									1				Ned Stark Jon Snow Arya Stark Sansa Stark / Cersei Lannister Jamie Lannister Robert Baratheon Tyrion Lannister Joffrey Baratheon "The Hound" "The Mountain" / Daenerys Targaryen Viserys Targaryen	
9GG_13	http://9gag.com/gag/4211152					1					1			I can't be the only one who thought the woman in the dress would do something else with that thing than hitting the other woman with it.	
9GG_14	http://9gag.com/gag/306704		1					1						glee of Thrones	Glee
9GG_15	http://9gag.com/gag/6436886									1		1		Your grace! News from Winterfell! / Who is it from, Robb? Is it Bran? Arya? Creepy walnut smashing Rickon?! Who Robb? Who? / Hodor Hodor Hodor Hodor Hodor	
9GG_16	http://9gag.com/gag/3343675								1	2				Game of Thrones!!! / Throne of Games!!! / Bitch please! Throne of Beer!!!	
9GG_17	http://9gag.com/gag/4485295					1						1		Jon Snow / Fat Friend / Cool girl / Cool girl's murder friend / The cripple / Rob / Other Robb / Ginger Stark / Oh yeah. I forgot about baby Stark / Tonks / Dragon girl / Dragon girl's body guard / Strong horse guy / Purple mouth / Fat king / Douche king / Gay king / Worst king / Captain Beard / Incest Knight / Bad Bitch / Gay Knight / Gay Knightsister / The Hound / Peter Dinklage / Peter Dinklage's fighter friend / Who the fuck is that? / Boobs	
9GG_18	http://9gag.com/gag/aOKgqM2									1	1			<b>Awesome Cake of Thrones</b>	
9GG_19	http://9gag.com/gag/aeNgBAm		1										1	<b>War of Thrones</b> [Game of Thrones vs. Star Wars]	Star Wars
9GG_20	http://9gag.com/gag/aeNdpQg	1												Google of Thrones / 4,284,810,951 Watt hours saved	Google
9GG_21	http://9gag.com/gag/ajrvD3G									1				<b>Game of Thrones / Thrones of Nerd</b>	
9GG_22	http://9gag.com/gag/154367		1							1			1	<b>Keanu of Thrones</b>	Keanu Reeves
9GG_23	http://9gag.com/gag/4248351										1			"Watch Game of Thrones" they said. / "It will be fun" they said.	
9GG_24	http://9gag.com/gag/aRQXmY7													Yourre mine / & / Im yours / And if we die / We die / But first / We will live	
9GG_25	http://9gag.com/gag/4016297		1			1								Not sure if Game of Thrones is porn with action / Or porn	Futurama
9GG_26	http://9gag.com/gag/6945320							1			1			Hipster Daenerys / Eating horsemeat before it was cool	
9GG_27	http://9gag.com/gag/a3d0vqm						1					1		Night Gathers / And now my watch begins	
9GG_28	http://9gag.com/gag/aPvZrNP		1									1		I'm looking for a hobbit to share in an adventure. / Will there be tits and wine? / God...I HOPE, so.	Lord of the Rings
9GG_29	http://9gag.com/gag/6049143					1				1				Dude! This "Game of Thrones" book what you lent me is very good! I am still at the beginning but I'm really enjoying it! I told you you'd like! Who's your favourite character so far? / Doesn't matter! / They always die...	
9GG_30	http://9gag.com/gag/aypOQjV	1									1	1		Yourre the love of my life Khaleesi... / Seen 5:22 P.M.	Facebook
9GG_31	http://9gag.com/gag/azbK108		1								1	1	1	I got my hand cut off. / I got my hand cut off. / I got my hand cut off.	Star Wars
9GG_32	http://9gag.com/gag/aoZrWWx	1						1						Game of Beer / Beer of Thrones	Heineken
9GG_33	http://9gag.com/gag/4599929	1												Where are my dragons? / Meanwhile on Facebook: Baby Dragons are here! Raise your own Pet Dragons, and get all source of treasure while youre at it! / Oh...OK.	Facebook
9GG_34	http://9gag.com/gag/3997242					1								Reasons why I watch Game of Thrones / The plot is interesting / To see the dwarf / BOOBS	
9GG_35	http://9gag.com/gag/aeNpGQq										1	1	1	I kissed my brother once / That's cute	Star Wars
9GG_36	http://9gag.com/gag/aBKvdzN				1					1				Your April / Hello april / Please be awesome / My April	
9GG_37	http://9gag.com/gag/a12Ej4G											1		They call me King of the North / But I'd go south on you	
9GG_38	http://9gag.com/gag/aLKW3zv				1				1					Me watching Game of Thrones the first few times / This intro is way too long / Me watching Game of Thrones now / BA DA DADADA DAA, DA DA DAAAAA	
9GG_39	http://9gag.com/gag/a441XWw								1					Fourth Season / Is coming	
9GG_40	http://9gag.com/gag/axNqL4M													[As a person who has never seen Game of Thrones, and all I know about it is from what people write in social media, this is the impression I have about it. / Dragon, war, sex, mess, WHAT A PLOT TWIST, EVERYBODY DIES.../ the end.]	
9GG_43	http://9gag.com/gag/a6dQznq	1					1				1			<b>Game of Thrones</b> [Hagebaumarkt outdoor ad w/ GoT characters]	Hagebaumarkt
9GG_44	http://9gag.com/gag/4168777					1					1			Game of Thrones / Only reason I wake up on Mondays	
9GG_45	http://9gag.com/gag/a1ApXGb			1						1		1		And then they all died. / The end.	
9GG_46	http://9gag.com/gag/a09DB10		1											Set in a patriarchy / Still has stronger female characters than Twilight	Twilight
9GG_47	http://9gag.com/gag/a2N30np	1												Jason Read / I watched the Game of Thrones finale last night; my favorite part was when Daenerys invented wage labor.	Facebook
9GG_48	http://9gag.com/gag/awrGgRQ							1			1	1		When your boyfriend is good with kids	
9GG_49	http://9gag.com/gag/aDAKpVG							1			1			<b>Cats of Thrones</b>	
9GG_50	http://9gag.com/gag/aARW5eg									1				<b>Walking Thrones</b>	
9GG_51	http://9gag.com/gag/azbgLRK	1							1					Checking most popular tv shows on thep****bay... / I should start watching Game of Thrones	The Pirate Bay
9GG_52	http://9gag.com/gag/arprP27		1						1			1		Queen	Queen
9GG_53	http://9gag.com/gag/aRgwDE7		1											Jon Snow wants to fight [Pokemon of Thrones]	Pokémon
9GG_54	http://9gag.com/gag/a0Zj6LA		1									1		<b>Loony Thrones</b>	Looney Toons
9GG_55	http://9gag.com/gag/ajPpOD0										1			Drogon / Rhaegal / Viserion	
9GG_56	http://9gag.com/gag/a9Mm5OK					1								A friend of mine marked every single deaths in the books	

<sup>42</sup> Abbreviated URLs valid as of Feb 2, 2015. The Table contains the list of a total of 715 images retained in the sample, with the primary coding used to further analyze the sample. The full sample of images can be downloaded from: [http://portal.uni-corvinus.hu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/hu/tanszekek/gazdalkodastudomanyi/t\\_marketing/pub/cst\\_2015\\_dissertation\\_memes\\_sample.zip](http://portal.uni-corvinus.hu/fileadmin/user_upload/hu/tanszekek/gazdalkodastudomanyi/t_marketing/pub/cst_2015_dissertation_memes_sample.zip)

Id	URL (as of Feb 2, 2015)	commercial brand	media brand	brand branding	oppositional brand	ritual	meaning making	meaning appropriation	memes template	fan art	comics, drawings, etc. from series	insider joke	remix, mashup	picture text, or description (italic), or title (bold, italic)	Brand name
9GG_57	http://9gag.com/gag/7074223													Game of Thrones / Tits, hair and blood	History Channel (Giorgio A. Tsoukalos)
9GG_58	http://9gag.com/gag/a7560eb										1	1		Fuck yeah, Piel	
9GG_59	http://9gag.com/gag/ag3Ppnn													Prince Rhaegar loved his Lady Lyanna. / And thousands died for it.	
9GG_60	http://9gag.com/gag/aOqlv6r													That's me when I see lovely couples.	
9GG_61	http://9gag.com/gag/aOqlv6r													You'll never walk again / But you will fly	
9GG_62	http://9gag.com/gag/aXbGMK6													Normal person on Mondays / Game of Thrones fan on Mondays	
9GG_63	http://9gag.com/gag/a1A2xb		1			1							1	Game of Thrones / Simpsons	Simpsons
9GG_64	http://9gag.com/gag/ab3Zgm						1					1		A got episode without at least three deaths / is considered as a dull affair	
9GG_65	http://9gag.com/gag/amXLeO2	2	1				1							Skyrim / + / Lord of the Rings / + / Porn hub / = / Game of Thrones	Skyrim, Lord of the Rings, Pornhub
9GG_66	http://9gag.com/gag/ao25A27		1						1					After watching the first episode of got / I was told there would be blood and gore	Office Space
9GG_67	http://9gag.com/gag/a0P3MmZ										1	1	1	My brother is my best friend / Bitch please	
9GG_68	http://9gag.com/gag/awrNp4W											1	1	Go hunting / Ruin everything for everyone	
9GG_69	http://9gag.com/gag/2254445		1						1			1		Wayne of Thrones [Batman on the Iron Throne]	Batman
9GG_70	http://9gag.com/gag/4335566									1				Pets of Thrones	
9GG_71	http://9gag.com/gag/4526601						1					1		I will give him the seven kingdoms / I drogo will do this / I will take my khalasar west to where the world ends and ride wooden horses across the black salt water as no Khal has done before / I will kill the men in iron suits and tear down their stone houses. / I will rape their women, take their children as slaves and bring their broken gods back to Vaes Dothrak. / This I vow, I Drogo son of Bharbo. / I swear before the mother of Mountains, as the stars look down in witness.	
9GG_72	http://9gag.com/gag/4386519									1				Am I the only one around here here / That doesn't watch the Game of Thrones	
9GG_73	http://9gag.com/gag/6971568					1								I watch the Game of Thrones / Just because I want to see how the dragons will look like	
9GG_74	http://9gag.com/gag/a6mWmee					1					1	1	1	And you never. / No. / Not once? / Never. / I congratulate you upon your restraint. / I will not breathe further life / into a malicious lie by discussing it.	Ali G Indahouse [Charles Dance]
9GG_75	http://9gag.com/gag/aeNj17m		1											Spoilers / Spoilers everywhere	Disney [Toy Story]
9GG_76	http://9gag.com/gag/aLOQkV									1				Season 5 / is coming	
9GG_77	http://9gag.com/gag/aRQJDDQ		1				1		2					Game of Thrones / Not sure if medieval action or medieval porn	Futurama
9GG_78	http://9gag.com/gag/a1A8oA6										1			When I was young / I was good...really good.	
9GG_79	http://9gag.com/gag/4017662						1		1					Game of Thrones / Not sure if porn or tv-series	Futurama
9GG_80	http://9gag.com/gag/ab5GxQX		1			1			1					If the new GoT season could come out / I would be so happy	South Park
9GG_81	http://9gag.com/gag/3917258	3									1			House Zuckerberg / Here we buy / House Page-Brin / The social network is coming / House Jobs-Cook / Ours is the beauty	Facebook; Apple; Google
9GG_82	http://9gag.com/gag/3970383											1		Porn of Thrones / Puberty is coming	
9GG_83	http://9gag.com/gag/5805461									1				Cake of Thrones	
9GG_84	http://9gag.com/gag/a44xwR6													Is cold / Oh no / Such / winter / much soon / wow / snow	
9GG_85	http://9gag.com/gag/a8WdztQY					1				1				What is this Game of Thrones they speak of? / *downloads and watches season 1 episode 1* / one hour later	
9GG_86	http://9gag.com/gag/6952299									1				Brace yourselves / Season 3 is coming	
9GG_87	http://9gag.com/gag/aG9QW17		1				1		1					One does not simply / stay alive in Game of Thrones	Lord of the Rings
9GG_88	http://9gag.com/gag/aXEXWd	1											1	Game of Thrones (GTA-style)	GTA
9GG_89	http://9gag.com/gag/4144648					1				1			1	"Le bored me (Tomas) next to my PC / When suddenly a wild Game of Thrones episode pops up / OMG I can't believe this is happening! Its time for... / Fap Fap Fap / Yes almost there!!! / When suddenly... / WTF	
9GG_90	http://9gag.com/gag/a9M9666									1				Came for the boobs / Stayed for the plot	
9GG_91	http://9gag.com/gag/avpNt1r								0					Impin' ain't easy	
9GG_92	http://9gag.com/gag/aDAEpmN										1	1		"Hodor". / - Hodor	
9GG_93	http://9gag.com/gag/2472152	1					1					1	1	Brazzers.	Brazzers
9GG_94	http://9gag.com/gag/ax2KORp											1		Life Note / How to use it? I. Write the name of a person who is dead, and they will be brought back to life. / NEDDDDDDDDD!	
9GG_95	http://9gag.com/gag/4038752						1			1		1		The lineage and histories of the great houses of the seven kingdoms / Steffon Baratheon: black of hair / Robert Baratheon: black of hair / Joffrey Baratheon: golden haired / DaFuq did I just read?	
9GG_96	http://9gag.com/gag/4414272		1						1	1				Happy Tree Thrones	Happy Tree Friends
9GG_97	http://9gag.com/gag/a2NRMBD		2								1		1	That moment when you realize that this person... / Fought against Luke Skywalker and Indiana Jones!!! / Mind = blown / Great! Now I'm waiting for this: / Look, I ain't in this for your revolution, and I'm not in it for you, princess. I expect to be well-paid. I'm in it for the money.	Star Wars, Indiana Jones (Julian Glover)
9GG_98	http://9gag.com/gag/apqRGQD	4												Beer of Thrones	Holsten, Halleroder, Coca-Cola, Sprite
9GG_99	http://9gag.com/gag/a9MBL1m		1							1			1	Breaking Thrones	Breaking Bad
9gag (search: "george r.r martin", first 25 posts visioned & extracted) (Jan 26, 2015)															
9GM_01	http://9gag.com/gag/aMbA82P									1			1	So, Mr. Martin, what will happen little Arya Stark? / Not now, son, I'm busy. I have to find a good ending for the Winds of Winter. / But, Mr. Martin, I only want to know what will happen to my favourite character! / Favourite, you say... / Good, good	
9GM_02	http://9gag.com/gag/arcpOVp		1							1			1	Gandalf should have stayed dead. / You have no power here.	Lord of the Rings
9GM_03	http://9gag.com/gag/aRgfgM7			1										I'll kill everything you love	
9GM_04	http://9gag.com/gag/aEGRMKK		1											Out of pages in this notebook. Gotta buy a new one... / I'm a fan... / Cheers love.	Death Note
9GM_05	http://9gag.com/gag/6743851			1										Every single time someone asks me how much til next book... / I kill a Stark.	
9GM_06	http://9gag.com/gag/aVoyKXp		1	1									1	We want him to plan / This guy's wedding	Justin Bieber
9GM_07	http://9gag.com/gag/a6K83M	1										1		George R. R. Martin @GRRM / "Time to kill off another character!" *Draws a name from hat* "Oh wow, everybody is gonna be pissed about this one... Let's make it gory."	Twitter
9GM_08	http://9gag.com/gag/aPvpPpQ		1									1		My favourite OS? ..Linux, without a doubt. / Get this! It even has a "killall" command!	Linux
9GM_09	http://9gag.com/gag/2371415			1								1	1	Its hard killing off so many characters. / You're adorable	J.K. Rowling
9GM_10	http://9gag.com/gag/amXoQd													So, still alive, huh? / Don't try to fuck me, old man	
9GM_11	http://9gag.com/gag/amX4Rbj	1											1	You Starks are hard to kill / George R. R. Martin @GeorgeRRMartin_ / The pen is mightier than the sword	Twitter
9GM_12	http://9gag.com/gag/845215										1		1	Kill all the characters!	
9GM_13	http://9gag.com/gag/aM1NomM					1						1		George R. R. martin... [GRRM takes a reader unawares from under the table]	
9GM_14	http://9gag.com/gag/6883362				1				1				1	Remember when everybody thought Ned was the main character? Hahahahaha / Hello other main characters! Who was laughing at Ned? / What? Nobody was laughing. / omg he kills / deep silence / serious position / don't kill me please	
9GM_16	http://9gag.com/gag/a2Nqe8d				1								1	Soon	
9GM_17	http://9gag.com/gag/ag9mb5w		1	1									1	Martin x Tolkien	Lord of the Rings
9GM_18	http://9gag.com/gag/4324330		1										1	Everybody lies / Everybody dies	House M.D.
9GM_19	http://9gag.com/gag/5556266				1				1				1	Hi! I wanted to introduced to you a friend of mine. I think you're going to get along. / All right. I'll leave you two alone. Have fun! / Bla bla bla / I had a great time! I just wanted to tell you that... / I love u! / Die!	
9GM_20	http://9gag.com/gag/a8Wvwop									1			1	One does not simply / Survive my weddings	
9GM_21	http://9gag.com/gag/ag0Gy2x		2										1	Just gonna stand there and watch me die? / That's all right. Because I love the way you die.	Eminem; Rihanna
9GM_22	http://9gag.com/gag/aRQ6W2q												1	Are you wondering...why I haven't finished the books of "Song of Ice and Fire" yet? / Well...it's simple...I have no characters left. / I killed them all!	
9GM_23	http://9gag.com/gag/a1QDQW4M				1	1			1					I've just started watching Game of Thrones / Now every time I see this meme I cry	
9GM_24	http://9gag.com/gag/atGrR2O		1	1									1	Glad im not in Game of Thrones / This George RR Martin is evil	Lord of the Rings
memesland.com ("Best of All Time", first 400 visioned; 200 + nonrepeating/ extracted) (Jan 20, 2015)															
ML_001	http://goo.gl/zUdhDV												1	We / are / never / ever / getting / back / together	
ML_002	http://goo.gl/1h2o18												1	I enjoyed the dinner but you dont have to pay for this / Oh no I incest /	
ML_003	http://goo.gl/p5h7lx	1											1	A Lannister always pays his debts. / For everyone else there is MasterCard.	MasterCard
ML_004	http://goo.gl/VLDAX2			1									1	House Stark / Ned Cat Robb Sansa Arya Bran Tony (no, Jon)	Iron Man
ML_005	http://goo.gl/82UxBR			1									1	Dick in a box	Saturday Night Live [Dick in a Box]
ML_006	http://goo.gl/OSpzwu					1							1	Game of Thrones drinking game / Drink when / Someone says winter is coming / A woman is naked / Jon is called a bastard / Tyrion drinks / Daenerys says Khaleesi / People have sex / Drink again if its incest / Someone is injured / Tyrion says something sexual / Swords are drawn / People say "A Lannister pays his debts." / Finish your drink when someone is beheaded / Bonus: drink whenever Hodor says "Hodor"	
ML_007	http://goo.gl/IFZQ5G								1				1	You look like my sister / If you come up North for me, I'll go down South on you / Your name must be Winter because you're about to coming / I'll stick you with the pointy end	
ML_009	http://goo.gl/6QeVMy												1	To the window / To the wall	
ML_010	http://goo.gl/g27IA1		1							1			1	It's my spot	Big Bang Theory
ML_012	http://goo.gl/Q7Kxuc										1			Ned learns a lesson in genetics / Joffrey / Oh my god	

id	URL (as of Feb 2, 2015)	commercial brand	media brand	brand branding	oppositional brand	ritual	meaning making	meaning appropriation	memes	fan art	comics, drawings, etc. from series	insider joke	remix, mashup	picture text, or description [italc], or title [bold, italic]	Brand name
ML_014	http://goo.gl/FU9Ve2						1					1		Jon Snow / Fat Friend / Cool girl / Cool girl's murder friend / The cripple / Rob / Other Robb / Ginger Stark / Oh yeah. I forgot about baby Stark / Tonks / Dragon girl / Dragon girl's body guard / Strong horse guy / Purple mouth / Fat king / Douche king / Gay king / Worst king / Captain Beard / Incest Knight / Bad Bitch / Gay Knight / Gay Knightsister / The Hound / Peter Dinklage / Peter Dinklage's fighter friend / Who the fuck is that? / Boobs	
ML_015	http://goo.gl/uCJRxn											1		Disobey's mom about climbing / Resulting chain of events lead to war throughout his nation and his father being killed	
ML_016	http://goo.gl/IHOJMd		1									1		Gee Batman, thanks for saving me! / You're welcome. Just promise me you'll do something great with your life. / Don't worry. / I will	Batman
ML_017	http://goo.gl/ZyT8ll								1	1				The Cake of Thrones / You eat or you die	
ML_018	http://goo.gl/GGUJ9c		1								1	1	1	Hello Joffrey / Oh trap	Dexter
ML_019	http://goo.gl/X9OxMu													Nailed it.	
ML_020	http://goo.gl/TISRLS	1												Vinnie's Pizzeria / Today's specials... / Kale Drogo / The scallion who mounts the whirled / Dothsnacki	Vinnie's Pizzeria (New York)
ML_021	http://goo.gl/3m8Pfv													[When asked if any of the cast of his book series, "A Song of Ice and Fire", will be left alive]: "No one will be alive by the last book. In fact, they all die in the fifth. The sixth book will be just a thousand-page description of snow blowing across the graves..." - George R. R. Martin	
ML_022	http://goo.gl/USDYQe										1	1		Where I come from, lowborn ladies say: "Mi'lord". / Where I come from, dads don't let their kids fuck each other.	
ML_023	http://goo.gl/2Nmu0s		1											[Shrek's Prince Charming vs. Jaime Lannister]	Shrek
ML_024	http://goo.gl/445J6x		3								1			Two and a half men / How I met your mother / Gossip girl	Two and a half men; How I met your mother; Gossip girl
ML_025	http://goo.gl/4V4VNU										1			Loras was young and very good at knocking men off horses with a stick but that does not make him wise / It's called a "Lance" / Hello?	
ML_026	http://goo.gl/YUSXeT												1	[Hodor...Hodor]	
ML_027	http://goo.gl/jBynWj		1				1	1						To me there is no difference	Shrek
ML_029	http://goo.gl/F8Jjd5	1												"Hodor" [on a carplate]	Subaru
ML_030	http://goo.gl/vUNEPl										1		1	That awkward moment / When you realize that the Khaalesi speaks Valerian	
ML_031	http://goo.gl/jumkRS		1	1										Can only say his name / Still a better actor than Kristen Stewart	Kristen Stewart
ML_034	http://goo.gl/cfvmj3	1												<b>Westeros Nintendo Style</b>	Nintendo
ML_036	http://goo.gl/CspTaf		10								1	1		Weird as religion / Next in line / Nobody wants him / Pint-sized lump of pure evil / Strong on 2nd Amendment / Terrible husband / "Came from behind" to be frontrunner / Popular in the Midwesterners / Wears perpetual smirk / Wants to go back to iron standard / Thinks handouts make you weak / Ignored by mainstream bards / Good-faith outreach to political opponents fails, predictably / Probably better at winning than ruling / Ultimately the least bad of the bunch / Often underestimated as a joker / Too Cool for the job / Would probably freakin' rock at it / Comes from a far away land / Wants to rule despite lack of qualifications / Uses her children to further her rise to power / Previous Ruler / Legendary fondness for women / Married to an ice-cold blonde / Right hand man of a previous ruler / Throne stolen / Always going on about climate change / Hodor.	(various public figures)
ML_037	http://goo.gl/D2CtuN		1								1			[Dexter & Jeoffrey]	Dexter
ML_038	http://goo.gl/A7x2Ti		1									1		Don't be fooled by the knighthood I got. / I'm still Davos from the Block	Jennifer Lopez
ML_039	http://goo.gl/2Tz7rT	1										1		Iron Bank of Braavos / Tywin Lannister	Visa
ML_040	http://goo.gl/SGS5mb	1												Be careful what you post on Facebook...	Apple
ML_041	http://goo.gl/nzMFkr		1										1	Gee Batman, thanks for saving me! / You're welcome. Just promise me you'll do something great with your life. / Don't worry. / I will	Batman
ML_042	http://goo.gl/FdeKRx										1			[Game of Thrones Inspired Dragon Egg pattern by Rachael Fulcher]	
ML_043	http://goo.gl/1h8SFm		1								1		1	There must always be a Stark in Winterfell	Iron Man
ML_044	http://goo.gl/Gy00DR													What do we say to the God of Procrastination? / Not today.	
ML_045	http://goo.gl/DvwmK3		6				1					1	1	Walking Dead / How I Met Your Mother / Two and a Half Men / Toddlers and Tiaras / CSI / Gossip Girl	Walking Dead; How I Met Your Mother; Two and a Half Men; Toddlers and Tiaras; CSI; Gossip Girl
ML_046	http://goo.gl/WiOJWq		1									1	1	I always wanted to be a ranger	Power Ranger
ML_047	http://goo.gl/NKJBFL													Odor by Hodor / The new fragrance for men	
ML_048	http://goo.gl/h90is5										1			[Houses of ASOIAF on a map of the USA]	
ML_049	http://goo.gl/c5Xka													<b>The Lannisters being big goofs!</b> [Tyrian, Cersei, Jaime funny picture]	
ML_050	http://goo.gl/GXqu1m										1			Summer is coming	
ML_052	http://goo.gl/U9eFe4		1					1					1	I wanna be the very best what viserys never was / The iron throne is my real test the dragons are my cause	Pokémon
ML_053	http://goo.gl/BLKSMY					1	1				1			How to explain Game of Thrones / Many people find Game of Thrones hard to resist, and equally hard to explain / What is Game of Thrones anyway? / Its a series of thick books that they made into an hour long tv series / Can you sum it up for me? / No. To condense it any further it would be too intense. It'd just be me shaking you and screaming into your face. / As complicated as the story is, it can be boiled down to simple universal themes. / Try to sum it up. / Take the fifty most murderous, duplicitous, treacherous, and violent people in the world. / Got it. / Now, put them in a room with one seat, and make them play musical chairs to the death. / One problem is that other fantasy epics have given people preconceived ideas. / One thing that makes Game of Thrones different from other tv shows is that even the characters you like can die often at unexpected times. / That sucks. / Its like real life. / Yeah, I dont watch fantasy shows because I like real life. / In the end thats the characters that draw people in, so focus on describing them. / It sounds like Game of Thrones has two kinds of characters: good, doomed people and bad, doomed people. / Its more complex than that. Nobody is 100% good or bad. / And Im sure theyre not all 100% doomed. / No theyre totally doomed but they are doomed in complex ways.	
ML_054	http://goo.gl/WZT9aJ												1	Teases you for knowing nothing / Thinks a windmill is a Lord's Castle	
ML_055	http://goo.gl/cvVUBU												1	You know youre awesome / When you nuke your enemies with medieval technology	
ML_056	http://goo.gl/SIX2hW													tylerakley / shouldertappinghosts / If I was a famous author I would publish a book with ten different endings which all went to print with varying degrees of rarity, but not tell the fans about it so that I could watch their confusion as they disagree over how the story ended. Then when they figured it out I would "come clean", telling them that I had released eleven alternate endings and watch them panic again as they all try to find the last ending.	
ML_057	http://goo.gl/sVQPwD												1	There is no word / For friendzone in Dothraki	
ML_058	http://goo.gl/c5Xka													<b>Robb and Jon in suits!!!</b>	
ML_059	http://goo.gl/jFF9I2													<b>The Mountain is a softy when it comes to puppies.</b>	
ML_060	http://goo.gl/wpRmye										1			[painting of Khal Drogo]	
ML_061	http://goo.gl/cPnOx					1	1				1			Game of Thrones Feeling / Alright! Time for another wedding! Awh! Look it! Baby Stark on the way! Theyre gonna name it Ned! Bless! / ...? ...the doors. The music?! / Oh god! Theyre trapped! This isn't good... I think Filch is evil. / Oh god! The baby! Robb no! Holy - I Oh no! Kill Filch's wife! Arya! Robb! Get the hell out! Not the dire wolf! / The credits...The outlet...Will this silence ever end...? / I dont understand the world anymore /	
ML_062	http://goo.gl/uy1jy2	1											1	Kellogge's Bronn Flakes / High in Fibre / Wholegrain / The only cure for being a cunt	Kellogg's
ML_064	http://goo.gl/NSvnljy						1						1	I liked some Game of Thrones characters once / It was awful	
ML_065	http://goo.gl/iOw9w7											1	1	Till death do us part? / I'll drink to that bitches!	
ML_066	http://goo.gl/XdsTKW												1	What do you mean? / I have to switch to Formula?	
ML_067	http://goo.gl/FmdP2v		6										1	There / are / villains / that / you just / cant / hate / Then there is this asshole	(various villains from movies)
ML_068	http://goo.gl/ErYfB		1											Where do you film Game of Thrones to get those beautiful landscapes? / Jersey	The Daily Show
ML_069	http://goo.gl/Sfmxdo								1					[Jon Snow and his direwolf on the Iron Throne]	
ML_071	http://goo.gl/TXysP6								1				1	They called their son Ned / And he died after 5 minutes / I dont want to live on this planet any more	Futurama
ML_072	http://goo.gl/Cp2LY													There is one thing thats interesting about your books. I noticed that you write women really well and really different. / Where does that come from? / You know... / Ive always considered women to be people	
ML_073	http://goo.gl/XVagTE						1							Joffrey's a bitch - Stannis	
ML_074	http://goo.gl/0fsfIU		1											Whatchu know 'bout rockin' a wolf on your noggin?	Macklemore
ML_075	http://goo.gl/z1LZuz	1											1	The Winds of Winter / By George R. R. Martin / Prologue	Microsoft Word
ML_076	http://goo.gl/sX6uL1		1	1				1				1	1	Excuse me. Is this the set of the Walking Dead? / No, sorry. This is the set of Game of Thrones. / Wrong set, everybody! Lets move out!	Walking Dead

id	URL (as of Feb 2, 2015)	commercial brand	media brand	brand branding	oppositional brand	ritual	meaning making	meaning appropriation	memes	fan art	(comics, drawings, etc. from series)	insider joke	remix, mashup	picture text, or description [italic], or title [bold, italic]	Brand name
ML_077	http://goo.gl/2VpXPh													Winterfell Weather Center / Winter is coming / Eddard Stark / Lord of Winterfell	
ML_078	http://goo.gl/vh2n3	1												Winter is coming / And its going to be one cold bastard! / Snuggie / Now in black	Snuggie
ML_079	http://goo.gl/tjHCVr		1				1	1						Walden Frey / Roose Bolton / Wedding Crashers / Life is a party. Crash it.	Wedding Crashers
ML_080	http://goo.gl/tUufln		1											Whose throne is it anyway? / [GRRM and model dragon]	Whose Line Is It Anyway
ML_081	http://goo.gl/150508													<b>Khaleesi's / eat celebrate relax</b>	Khaleesi's
ML_082	http://goo.gl/ALG6I6	1												I got burned once / Thats cute	Star Wars
ML_083	http://goo.gl/QgN7Uw		1						1					Rob Lowe @RobLowe / "The Americans" on FX is the best drama on TV. Sorry to all zombies and trolls or whatever, but its a fact. / You know nothing / Rob Lowe	Twitter; Rob Lowe
ML_085	http://goo.gl/dn1a4C	1	1	1										How to chain / your dragon	How to Train Your Dragon
ML_086	http://goo.gl/a16m6b		1				1							<b>Since people are comparing the books to the show a lot lately, here's what book Tyrion looks like.</b>	
ML_087	http://goo.gl/371Wcc						1				1			I am the god of tits and wine	
ML_088	http://goo.gl/uLe01U													<b>Jon Snow wearing a shirt with Robb Stark on it</b>	
ML_089	http://goo.gl/OhFWnV													It'd probably be something really cheesy like "Be Yourself" / The sigil would be, I dont know, it would probably be like a balerina or something because theyre strong and graceful / Well, I really like turtles. Well, tortoises. / And they have got a hard shell, so our motto would be "Go Hard or Go Home / The Harrington family motto is, its a bit weird, but its "A Firm Knot" / It means hold fast, stay in there / The motto would be "Oh for god's sake" / Do you know how some times when you get an ice lolly, or a popsicle and you wait too long to eat it and it melts and falls off the stick? / The disappointment that that encapsulates would suit. "Oh for god sakes" perfectly / Although to go into battle with that on a banner, youve lost the battle already psychologically I think	
ML_090	http://goo.gl/Y8Qkyi													What a good dude. Why did I hate him again? / Oh yea	
ML_092	http://goo.gl/XjjaAI						1				1			So youre like, really pretty / Thank you / So you agree? / What? / You think youre really pretty?	
ML_094	http://goo.gl/qstsaC						1				1			Chess / Game of Thrones rule / Your king is your most important piece, but if you lose him it doesnt matter, you can just point a new piece and make that one your king. It doesnt matter which one.	
ML_095	http://goo.gl/5Sjcnx						1	1						I swear it / By the old dogs and the new	
ML_096	http://goo.gl/q9x8d4											1		"People often claim to hunger for truth, but seldom like the taste when its served up." Tyrion Lannister	
ML_097	http://goo.gl/ES4pol						1				1			<b>Family Guy: Quest for Stuff</b>	Family Guy
ML_098	http://goo.gl/ADQSe0		1											I would let Khal Drogo's Army rape you / All 40,000 of them / Even the horses	Social Network
ML_099	http://goo.gl/tMBhe1		1											Hey, Gandalf! / What? / Winter is coming	Lord of the Rings
ML_100	http://goo.gl/q92Fe7		1					1	1		1			You challenge me to a pokemon battle? / So be it.	Pokémon
ML_101	http://goo.gl/a9KcqT		1					1			1			[Game of Thrones actor Gwendoline Christie posing with her action figure]	
ML_102	http://goo.gl/5z2pc0													House House / Everybody lies	House M.D.
ML_103	http://goo.gl/3rz5i3		1											Grey wind / Lady / Nymeria / Summer / Shaggy dog / Ghost / Cancel / Choose a direwolf	
ML_104	http://goo.gl/qdYIkv													Tells Gendry she will be his family / Got M'Lady-zoned instead	
ML_105	http://goo.gl/qcs59l													[GOT merchandising]	
ML_106	http://goo.gl/ASPHYT													Tyrion Lannister could not have been more astonished if Aegon the Conqueror himself had burst into the room, riding on a dragon and juggling lemon pies.	
ML_107	http://goo.gl/F8xHKx													Our cgi budget is growing fast / Not fast enough	
ML_108	http://goo.gl/jKbdc						1	1			1	1		Not my chair / Not my problem	
ML_109	http://goo.gl/tGQdU7								1					AMC has zombies... / Thats cute	AMC
ML_110	http://goo.gl/wyF5dn		1	1										talk shit [Sums up the situation exactly]	
ML_111	http://goo.gl/LQpdtT										1	1		Hodor peered over the knee-high lip of the well and said: "HODORI!" The word echoed down the well "Hodorhodorhodorhodorhodor", fainter and fainter "hodorhodorhodorhodorhodor", until it was less than a whisper. Hodor looked startled. Then he laughed, and bent to scoop a broken piece of slate off the floor.	
ML_112	http://goo.gl/6zvrS													Oh fuck / ancestry.com / We will help you discover your family story.	Ancestry.com
ML_113	http://goo.gl/Vzprsd	1												My face after watching the Game of Thrones season 3 premiere / My face after watching the Walking Dead season 3 finale	
ML_114	http://goo.gl/CKN7ey			1	1					1				Because the best moments of the series involve Tyrion slapping Joffrey	
ML_115	http://goo.gl/Js9Dbh						1				1			<b>A Cake of Thrones</b>	
ML_116	http://goo.gl/n5bPB8									1				Whats wrong, my darling? / At the meeting, Petyr asked if we had updog in Winterfell / But when I asked what that was, the council all laughed at me. I dont understand. / Ned...did you say, "Whats up, dog?"	
ML_117	http://goo.gl/G96Ypl										1	1		Hey, Jaime, why do Lannisters have such big beds? / I dont know, why? / Because they push two twins together to make a king.	
ML_118	http://goo.gl/RPbxtN										1	1		[Peter Dinklage in t-shirt: "Keep calm and demand trial by combat"]	
ML_119	http://goo.gl/wsYtex												1	Hodor? / Hodor.	
ML_120	http://goo.gl/JeIA6d													[car plate: "Jonssnow / I know nothing"]	
ML_121	http://goo.gl/o2rYWU					1								[biology test w/ exercises on dominant and recessive genes - in relationship w/ GOT]	
ML_122	http://goo.gl/q3fzke					1								Charles Dance / Tywin Lannister / Game of Thrones / David Carlton / Ali G In Da House (2002)	Ali G Indahouse [Charles Dance]
ML_123	http://goo.gl/ygAkFj		1											[I wish I could have seen this sweet summer childs reactions tonight... ] I think Season 3 is pretty straightforward / Daenerys comes to Westeros. allies with R. Stark (why? he said he doesnt wanna be King. she wants to be Queen. Hell use her help and dragons to bndg down Lannisters). / War between Stark + Daenerys vs. Lannisters and Teryll / Rob Stark wins. Daenerys is Queen. / White Walkers come down and then Daenerys us. dragons to kill them too. since the uncle. die by fire. / Dunno, I fed like the storyline is getting Predictable.	
ML_124	http://goo.gl/hbFM3u													<b>Starks shall rule all</b> [Robert Downey Jr on the Iron Throne]	Iron Man
ML_126	http://goo.gl/RUrv4k		1						1					King Slayer / The demonic Jaime Lannister / @GoT_Tyion	Slayer
ML_127	http://goo.gl/eeYKFT											1		<b>Maisie Williams looking good.</b>	
ML_128	http://goo.gl/sz21KY													Khuu khuu khuu / Spuff [GRRM fan fun art]	
ML_129	http://goo.gl/M1miwz			1						1				Luke / Jaime	Star Wars
ML_131	http://goo.gl/1nNMSd		1								1			Kim in the North	Kim Jong-un
ML_132	http://goo.gl/OEbdA4		1								1	1		I immediately regret this decision	Anchorman
ML_133	http://goo.gl/xSFMxg		1											<b>"I have a son, you have a daughter"... "We were meant to rule together"</b>	
ML_134	http://goo.gl/5dYjBX													<b>If Disney Did Game of Thrones</b>	Disney
ML_135	http://goo.gl/LsVFME		1											The world will look up and shout: "Save us!" / And I will look down and whisper "Hodor"	
ML_136	http://goo.gl/FGfK0b						1				1			So their son will be your nephew / And you will be the king's stepfather and brother-in-law / When you marrying the king / Joffrey's mother will become his sister-in-law / And your son will be Loras' nephew? / Grandson? Im not sure. / But your brother will become your father-in-law / That much is beyond dispute.	
ML_137	http://goo.gl/um1Kct						1				1	1		tyrion and bronn	Calvin and Hobbes
ML_138	http://goo.gl/k5Ziwu		1					1						Cocaine / is one hell of a drug	Lord of the Rings
ML_139	http://goo.gl/L2NC68		1									1		I get letters about that fairly regularly. Its a uniquely American prudishness. You can write the most detailed, vivid description of an axe entering a skull and nobody will say a word in protest. But if you write a similarly detailed description of a penis entering a vagina, you get letters from people saying they will never read you again. What the hell? Penises entering vaginas bring a lot more joy into the world than axes entering skulls.	
ML_140	http://goo.gl/ARc7yO													My new blade, heart-eater I've named it / Thats adorable	
ML_141	http://goo.gl/UlnuQ8											1	1	<b>Robert vs. Rheagar</b>	
ML_142	http://goo.gl/1AvTlj											1		In the books: I've not changed at all / In the show: I have got fat	
ML_143	http://goo.gl/ao487n						1							I know that he is guilty. He and Sansa planned it together. - Shae / Why dont you go back to your home on whore island?	Anchorman
ML_144	http://goo.gl/g9owbY		1				1		1		1	1		Reyen el Norte [Photo of Racing Santander match fans]	Racing Santander
ML_145	http://goo.gl/EZC3oa		1					1						Got an army, freed a city, and I didnt have to give up a dragon / Today was a good day	
ML_147	http://goo.gl/he8Ywd						1							George Martin has told how he planned the rest of series to producers David Benioff and Dan Weiss in case he dies before finishing the series.	
ML_148	http://goo.gl/AGK49v													Jack Gleeson @JackGleeson92 / How does someone get their account verified @twitter / Tyrion Lannister @GoT_Tyion / @JackGleeson92 I believe that @twitter requires grants of land and title for verification / Jack Gleeson @JackGleeson92 / @GoT_Tyion @twitter they can have the stark girl	Twitter; Jack Gleeson
ML_149	http://goo.gl/jvQZ1		1	1										Arya, what do we say to the Walking Dead / Not today.	Walking Dead
ML_151	http://goo.gl/vzKfKQ		1	1					1		1			Daenerys Stormborn...+ Mother of Dragons / Finally, my coffee	Starbucks
ML_152	http://goo.gl/ANe9lc		1				1				1	1		Happy Name Day cake	
ML_153	http://goo.gl/ullgpk									1				I can be your hero baby / I can kiss away the pain / I will stand by you forever / You cant take my bread away	Enrique Iglesias
ML_154	http://goo.gl/KC2hZ8		1				1								

Id	URL (as of Feb 2, 2015)	commercial brand	media brand	brand branding	oppositional brand	ritual	meaning making	meaning appropriation	theme template	fan art (comics, drawings, etc. from series)	insider joke	remix, mashup	picture text, or description (italics), or title [bold, italic]	Brand name
ML_155	http://goo.gl/Nnmrtm		1				1		1		1		You dirty bird how could you? / ???? / He cant be dead Jon Snow cannot be dead. / You may have noticed in my novels people die all the time...besides he is gonna warg into Ghost... / I dont want him warging into Ghost I want him alive!!!! / Okay...	Misery
ML_156	http://goo.gl/cHYlW						1				1		In the spirit of peace and joy / Lord Walder of House Frey / request the honor of your presence / at the marriage of his daughter / Roslin to Edmure / of House Tully / Sunday June 2nd 2013 at 9 pm / Live music provided by the Castamere Crossbow Quartet / Singing and massacre immediately following the ceremony / Sorry no pets or weapons allowed	
ML_158	http://goo.gl/O7I496						1				1		Sam sees a Whitewalker approaching / Knows only fire can kill it / Armed with only a sword and a flaming stick / Throws flaming stick on the ground? / He then finds acient weapon / which proves to kill Whitewalkers instatly / ...runs away / leaving the weapon / on the ground behind him	
ML_159	http://goo.gl/INUgaM				1						1		"sweet" Jon / "horrified" Jon / "judging you" Jon / "angry" Jon / "bitch, please" Jon / "sad" Jon / "happy" Jon / "WTF/disgusted" Jon / "hurting" Jon	
ML_160	http://goo.gl/Y8o4gr									1			...Whoa / I know dude / Boys / Lets ride / Khaleesi out	
ML_162	http://goo.gl/LWC3zh						1		1		1		when a boy treat you like a princess	
ML_163	http://goo.gl/UVI914									1			<b>The King find's out he's just won the title of Mr. Westeros</b>	
ML_164	http://goo.gl/GPVyyl									1			They are dragons Khaleesi... / No shit Jorah I thought they were dolphins	
ML_165	http://goo.gl/uwHxMy		1								1		Im so far from home... / ...Oh? How far is that?	Star Trek
ML_166	http://goo.gl/92VwRA						1						Trust the wrong people / Have cool pets / Play with fire / Hate Joffrey	
ML_167	http://goo.gl/KXiueA												<b>Our new Mountain that Rides!</b>	
ML_168	http://goo.gl/Cx3fr2	1					1						Kickstarter / Game of Thrones special - Arya Slaughters House Frey	Kickstarter
ML_171	http://goo.gl/3DXWv		1										Before you kiss a boy / grab his waist / pull him closer to your body / look into his eyes / look at his lips while your biting yours / look back at his eyes again / grab his face gently / then slowly lean in and whisper into his ear: / "the	Harry Potter
ML_172	http://goo.gl/VBMur4						1						Is a dwarf, sentenced to death twice / still made it through 4 seasons of GoT/respect	
ML_173	http://goo.gl/NKCYzb										1		True detective / Season 2	True Detective
ML_174	http://goo.gl/CI9ns4		1								1		<b>The final king of Westeros</b>	
ML_175	http://goo.gl/KTjv6								1		1		Mother of hover kitties	
ML_176	http://goo.gl/ugfvsy									1	1		In case of Whitewalkers break glass	
ML_177	http://goo.gl/ZGSxQ		1	1									Its hard killing off so many characters. / Youre adorable	J.K. Rowling
ML_178	http://goo.gl/OyH5L4		1										When is the next book coming out? / 5 years...Im a slow writer / 1 year I can hurry up	Misery
ML_179	http://goo.gl/PVzMaT										1		Before you kiss a boy / grab his waist / pull him closer to your body / look into his eyes / look at his lips while your biting yours / look back at his eyes again / grab his face gently / then slowly lean in and whisper into his ear: / "the	
ML_180	http://goo.gl/k8OwaC						1				1		Game of Thrones BINGO	
ML_181	http://goo.gl/1slnAD										1		<b>This scene won me over</b>	
ML_182	http://goo.gl/Pk3Ws7										1	1	<b>I googled Margery Tyrell. Was not disappointed</b>	
ML_183	http://goo.gl/2OF6sG										1	1	<b>What Bran will look like next season</b>	
ML_184	http://goo.gl/2zyvjx									1			<b>Portrait of Jamie Lannister</b>	
ML_185	http://goo.gl/68BHG		1										I let the dogs out	Baha Men
ML_186	http://goo.gl/N3RCAG						1			1			The Adventures of Tsundere Clegane / Someone help! My kitty is stuck in a tree / Cats are horrible animals, they should all be put in a sack and beaten to death / You are a stupid little cow for owing one and I hope it drags home a plague rat and kills your family / Thank you Mr. The Hound! / I should have slaughtered your parents and made you watch! / What a nice man!	
ML_188	http://goo.gl/rp38DK						1				1		Bases claim only of his birthright / Denies Sansa's birthright / Because he doesnt like her husband	
ML_189	http://goo.gl/JLZMHM		1										To me there is no difference	Shrek
ML_192	http://goo.gl/Jjsamt						1				1		Is the an idiot in any village who trusts Littlefinger?	
ML_193	http://goo.gl/vPHAkn		1	1								1	They all deserve to die! / Brilliant idea / Have to note this	Sweeney Todd
ML_194	http://goo.gl/5filza												I found myself at one point talking to three very nice actors, who were very pleasant and I was having a great time talking with them and drinking with them... / And then I suddenly realized I had killed all three of them at various points in the series, and that these would all shortly be unemployed actors / And I had a moment of horrible guilt	
ML_195	http://goo.gl/RB0eSB							1				1	Joffrey adopts an adorable lion cub and learns the true meaning of christmas / Next season the dragons talk! / After season four we're doing a complete reboot Daenerys Targaryen played by Zachary Quinto / Arya Stark discovers the ruins of the Statue of Liberty on the beach and realizes she was on Earth the whole time / Hodor / Jaime Lannister forms "King Slayer" the first heavy metal band in Westeros / The lords and ladies of Winterfell are saved by their long los cousin, the creator of the Iron Throne, Tony Stark / Winter comes. Its not so bad. Cosy. / Hodor / Oh, crap! I wa- I was supposed to write more books?	
ML_196	http://goo.gl/Bv3Lar		1							1		1	<b>Disadvantage of knowing nothing</b> [Jeopardy game show w/ Jon Snow]	Jeopardy [game show]
ML_198	http://goo.gl/pFmXhS							1				1	Whoever's got the longest hair, is the biggest pimp so	
ML_199	http://goo.gl/KCCuFW											1	This guy is the nastiest skank bitch Ive ever met. Do not trust him he is a fugly slut!	
ML_200	http://goo.gl/KRbuKX						1						Rest in peace Lady Stark	
ML_201	http://goo.gl/CvbtAv		1				1						<b>I do this at least one time per book</b>	Neverending Story
ML_202	http://goo.gl/glxelU									1			Not today	
ML_203	http://goo.gl/74HQu4										1	1	The Brains / The Bronn	
ML_204	http://goo.gl/EwHV6H					1				1			Westeros Calling / This Game of Thrones show is actually really good / You should check out the books honey, theyre supposed to be great / A short time and five books later / Have you seen my mascara? / Es havazhaan vikeesi! Ezas eshna gech ahileel! Me nem nesa... / Get lost annoying woman! Find another hole to dig. It is known...	
ML_205	http://goo.gl/1IGJmE		1									1	[Snake killed...Dumbledore]	Harry Potter
ML_206	http://goo.gl/sP3iPo	1										1	Game of Thrones VI / Westeros [GTA-style]	GTA
ML_207	http://goo.gl/yGiUme						1			1			Lawful good / You think my life is so precious to me that I would trade my honor for a few more years of...what? / Neutral good / I am the wife of the great Khal and I carry his son inside me. The next time you raise a hand to me will be the last time you have hands. / Chaotic Good / Sansa can have her sewing needles. I have a needle of my own. / Lawful neutral / The wine slowed him down and the boar ribbed him open, but it was your mercy that killed the king / True neutral / Never forget what you are. The rest of the world will not. Wear it like an armor and it can never be used to hurt you. / Chaotic neutral / Im trying to get you to run my kingdom while I eat drink and whore my way to an early grave / Lawful evil / You are now hand of the king and protector of the realm. All of the power is yours. You need only reach out and take it. / Neutral evil / Some day you will sit on the throne and the thruth will be what you make it. / Chaotic evil / We allow the northerners too much power. They consider themselves our equals.	
ML_209	http://goo.gl/6QO2cc					1							[GOT in a maths exercise]	
ML_213	http://goo.gl/nQZVWC						1		1			1	Keep calm and carry Bran	
ML_214	http://goo.gl/9wh1I1											1	<b>This scene broke my heart.</b>	
ML_215	http://goo.gl/p125Jl												Fun fact: George R. R. Martin survives solely on the tears of Game of Thrones fans.	
ML_219	http://goo.gl/LN15G4		2								1	1	That awkward moment when you find out that Hermiones mom, Tonks and Argus Filch are on Game of Thrones / And lets not forget Fred Flinstone!	Harry Potter; The Flintstones
ML_220	http://goo.gl/FWVRRG	1											<b>Kings Landing Minecraft</b>	Minecraft
ML_221	http://goo.gl/q3cwoV		1										<b>Tywin-Lannister-dancing-in-Agi-G-Movie</b>	Ali G Indahouse [Charles Dance]
ML_222	http://goo.gl/JHy6cj		1					1			1	1	Gandalf? What the f**k happened to you?	Lord of the Rings
ML_223	http://goo.gl/wLb6ra		1					1					Who put a dick in this box?	Disney [Snow White]
ML_235	http://goo.gl/2tTlGw		1					1					Something is coming. Can you feel it? Is it winter? No! Its...Game of Thrones princesses! / Princess Arya says: Valar Morghulis...all men must die! / Princess Daenerys says: Those would harm you will die screaming! / Inside every little girl is a dynastic figurehead in a brutally patriarchal society, fighting her way to the top at every turn with her wit and raw courage, boiling with hatred inside. Collect all 106 princesses today!	Disney
ML_261	http://goo.gl/xdisFN	1											Game of Habitable Zones [scientific article in Science magazine on hundred-year long winters and summers]	Science
ML_262	http://goo.gl/Y5dZcv	1							1	1		1	Awesome throne! Im buying it! / Damn you IKEA	Ikea
ML_281	http://goo.gl/YUEuv9		1									1	Walt Disney pictures Game of Thrones.	Disney
ML_316	http://goo.gl/WCy791	1					1				1	1	Kill them! Kill them all! / Joffrey! Eat a Snickers / Why? / Because you turn into a vicious idiot king when youre hungry. / Better? / Better! / Better!	Snickers
ML_319	http://goo.gl/pltMYa	1											Im going to have to eat all the chicken in this room - The Hound	KFC
Reddit (/r/aSongOfMemesAndRage/, top 200 posts of all time visioned) (Feb. 1, 2015)														
RES_002	http://goo.gl/10teJv												I need hype, Daniel / Chillax Dave! Season 5 setup. Season 6 payoff. We talked about this.	
RES_004	http://goo.gl/v8Roog											1	Nobody expects the Stannis inquisition!!!	
RES_005	http://goo.gl/OXpIrp												You raped her, you murdered her, you killed her children	

Id	URL (as of Feb 2, 2015)	commercial brand	media brand	brand branding	oppositional brand	ritual	meaning making	meaning appropriation	memes	template	fan art	comics, drawings, etc. from series	insider joke	remix, mashup	picture text, or description [italic], or title [bold, italic]	Brand name
RES_006	http://goo.gl/3MlTmA					1							1		Remember Bran, no climbing! / You know what? It would be selfish to worry my mother. Especially while she is accommodating royalty. I will go play with my badass direwolf instead. / You shouldnt trust me. / Ok, I wont trust you then. / Hey Robb! Lets get married! / Lol. Im not losing this war over one chick. Get out of my fucking tent. / Hey Tyrion! The assassin that tried to kill Bran had this knife. Know anything about it? / Oh, that thing? It went missing from the army a few days ago. I'll look into it. / Good thing you decided to just ask instead of sending your men after me. We could have started a war!	
RES_007	http://goo.gl/Zx0Fv		1		1										Actual photo of Robert and Stannis Baratheon	Disney [Hercules]
RES_008	http://goo.gl/uyiEKK								1						"The Red Wedding" is not a code word. Its a turn of Freys.	
RES_009	http://goo.gl/0c5XFN	1					1						1		Daenerys Stormborn ... + the mother of Dragons [Starbucks cup inscription]	Starbucks
RES_010	http://goo.gl/ujjqUD													1	Excuse me ser. Do you have a moment to talk about our lord a saviour Stannis the Mannis?	
RES_011	http://goo.gl/adu5m						1						1		Stop trying to make meeren happen. Its not going to happen.	
RES_012	http://goo.gl/QS3BC4														My father won the real war! He killed prince Rhaegar while you hit under Casterly. Rock! / No, your father killed king Aerys, thats why we call him the Kingslayer. /	
RES_013	http://goo.gl/AH8W7														I never said brace yourselves	
RES_014	http://goo.gl/PkDSME	1					1								Red Tube / Wife watches while husband gets mind-blowing head	Red Tube
RES_015	http://goo.gl/HICvhn		1							1					Hes a Targaryen! / And youre a Targaryen! / And she is a Targaryen! / Everyone is a Targaryen!	Oprah
RES_016	http://goo.gl/mJTQMW	1													whoistroule / glenfoy / today i ordered coffee under name "stannis" and i shit you not the barrista called out "i have a regular caramel latte for the one true king of westeros" / #who knew davos worked at starbucks	Starbucks
RES_017	http://goo.gl/i2uqhZ			1									1		George R. R. Martin, standing in front of his private artificial lake, which he had filled with the tears of his fans...	
RES_018	http://goo.gl/m0c2S6												1	1	Hey Brienne. Have you ever been mistaken for a man? / No. / Have you?	
RES_019	http://goo.gl/i3Ku5					1								1	I heard you were talkin shit about House Tully.	
RES_020	http://goo.gl/d5rHbi												1	1	What do we say to the God of Death? / Sean Bean is that way!	
RES_021	http://goo.gl/EPHv0z				1								1	1	Prayed to the old gods for the first time / School was cancelled due to six inches for snow	
RES_022	http://goo.gl/XKmZeO												1	1	Fuck the king	
RES_023	http://goo.gl/nINU6P												1	1	What do we say to the god of death? / Sean Bean is over there	
RES_024	http://goo.gl/cBpne7		1					1					1		Ex-men	X-Men
RES_025	http://goo.gl/7Xx0OX	1						1							You killed my sister / Im going to hear you confess before you die / You marinated her, you fried her, you scrambled her children	Southern Fried Chicken
RES_026	http://goo.gl/e6hSPs					1									A bird sees. A bird hears. A bird knows.	
RES_028	http://goo.gl/CmuATT											1	1		I know how you can defeat the Yunkish ships / Tell me. I swear if this is another fucking pun / You need sub-Mereens	
RES_029	http://goo.gl/QYGSx													1	[Spoilers ASOS] We all know what to look forward to in next week's episode!	
RES_030	http://goo.gl/cmipqK											1	1		Tonights forecast / 6-8 inches of snow	
RES_031	http://goo.gl/Rukgdp						1								And it was in that moment that he realized that when she said "You know nothing Jon Snow" / What she really meant "I love you"	
RES_032	http://goo.gl/zKvQPJ		1											1	[S4E10 Spoilers] Posted on the Kit Harington FB page	Simpsons
RES_035	http://goo.gl/RRQLaA	1													George R. R. Martin @GRRM / I dont know why people are so excited for the Winds of Winter...Its only going to make people cry	Twitter
RES_036	http://goo.gl/uofnUG		1										1		Remember when Walder Frey invited Robb Stark to a wedding? / The North remembers	Family Guy
RES_037	http://goo.gl/P0nc1D			1						1			1		Viserys Targaryen nominates you / For the molten gold challenge	
RES_038	http://goo.gl/DQpql4		1												You have no power here	Harry Potter
RES_039	http://goo.gl/yTyOCC		1										1	1	I kissed my brother once / That's cute / Got troubles with my dad / Thats cute / By the gods its cold. I feel like Im frozen / Real cute guys / I ambushed some people at a party / I even froze one of them because Im hardcore / Did you hear that honey? He froze one. / I thought they smelled bad on the outside / Thats cute / When my subordinates question my leadership / I choke them for a second till they shut up, them release them / Whatever works for you bro / Nobody likes me / Thats a eesa cute / I got burned once / Thats cute / I got my hand cut off / I got my hand cut off / And what exactly are you boys crying about?	Star Wars
RES_040	http://goo.gl/OB22IH		1										1	1	[S1/AGOT] Tim Howard with his greatest save yet	Tim Howard
RES_041	http://goo.gl/xjQZmf												1		Dont worry Im introducing a cool new character in season 4 / His name is Oberyn Martell	
RES_043	http://goo.gl/srfonh						1								The wall was built to protect / The white walkers from Stannis Baratheon	
RES_047	http://goo.gl/srPH6U						1						1		Season 1 Omg she fucks her brother what a bitch / Season 4 Omg she doesnt fuck Jaime what a bitch	
RES_048	http://goo.gl/qongPP												1	1	We do not sew	
RES_050	http://goo.gl/zd3xgP		1				1								I was forced to marry by political reasons / Another woman tried to kill me because I was too beautiful / I married a monster because my father was weak / I had to leave my family and home for my prince / Im a Disney Princess	Disney
RES_051	http://goo.gl/HwQUJ3		1												I am your king / I didnt vote for you / You dont vote for kings / Well how did you become king then? / The Lady of the Lake, her arm clad in the purest shimmering samite held aloft Excalibur from the bosom of the water / signifying by divine providence that I, Arthur was to carry Excalibur. THAT is why I am your king. / Listen, strange women lying in ponds distributing swords is no basis for a system of government / Supreme executive power derives from a mandate from the masses, not from some farcical aquatic ceremony / You cant expect to wield supreme executive power just because some watery tart threw a sword at you / If I went 'round sayin' I was emperor, just because some moistened bint lobbed a scimitar at me they'd put me away	Monty Python and the Holy Grail
RES_052	http://goo.gl/0Y4CTp							1						1	[Petryphelling intensifies]	
RES_053	http://goo.gl/egaEXP												1	1	You know, Renly has never been my husband / He has been my husband / I never got the D	
RES_054	http://goo.gl/gPQLR												1	1	Live your life with no Ygrittes	
RES_055	http://goo.gl/7L87Nk				1								1	1	Before Game of Thrones / uuhh...still too hot / After Game of Thrones / I am the blood of the dragon	
RES_056	http://goo.gl/yLtmHK	1												1	George R. R. Martin @GRRM / Ouch! Just stubbed my toe! Someone is gonna have to pay for this. ...Sorry Sansa	Twitter
RES_057	http://goo.gl/pdlwSk					1									Gave my 63 y.o. aunt Game of Thrones for christmas / 6 months later she has read all of the books, bought the dvds, and named the new puppy Khaleesi	
RES_058	http://goo.gl/vSoFdA	1								1			1		Oh Dolorous Ed / Youre Dolorous	Apple
RES_059	http://goo.gl/mdDelp		10										1	1	Game of American Thrones / Weird ass religion / Next in line / Nobody wants him / Pint-sized lump of pure evil / Strong on 2nd Amendment / Terrible husband / "Came from behind" to be frontrunner / Popular in the Midwesterns / Wears perpetual smirk / Wants to go back to iron standard / Thinks handouts make you weak / Ignored by mainstream bards / Good faith outreach to political opponents fail, predictably / Probably better at winning than ruling / Ultimately the least bad of the bunch / Often underestimated as a joker / Too Cool for the job / Would probably freakin rock at it / Comes from a land far away / Wants to rule despite lack of qualifications / Uses her children to further rise to power / Previous ruler / Legendary fondness for women / Married to an ice-cold blonde / Right hand man of a previous ruler / Throne stolen / Always going on about climate change / 'nuff said...	(various public figures)
RES_060	http://goo.gl/fjgioO						1						1		I should buy a boat	
RES_061	http://goo.gl/BL2uvy		1							1			1		...but rises again, harder and stronger!	Gordon Ramsay
RES_062	http://goo.gl/b8OI4M		1										1		Starks / Starks everywhere	Disney [Toy Story]
RES_063	http://goo.gl/pM4gG5		1		1	1			1						If Ive seen the show can I skip the first two boo-- / No!	Batman
RES_064	http://goo.gl/koHWcz	1					1						1		Fun fact: George R. R. Martin survives solely on the tears of Game of Thrones fans. / George R. R. Martin @GRRM / This isnt true. I also drink wine.	Twitter
RES_065	http://goo.gl/63hZW5												1		In a world where might is right and beauty is queen, it is the underdogs / and outsiders who capture our fancy / for whom we root the hardest.	
RES_066	http://goo.gl/BQEFc8												1	1	Where I come from, lowborn ladies say: "M'lord". / Where I come from, dads don't let their kids fuck each other.	
RES_067	http://goo.gl/LxZmP		1				1							1	How I never met my mother	How I Met Your Mother
RES_068	http://goo.gl/r2OkeT													1	[ASOS] When I remember what's happening this Sunday	
RES_069	http://goo.gl/KrDeFV								1						Stop spamming reddit or I will report your account / I will get another	
RES_070	http://goo.gl/U628WI								1				1		Miss Westeros	
RES_071	http://goo.gl/mwunzf		1										1	1	Darth Maul be like / #nomakeupselfie	Star Wars [Darth Maul]
RES_072	http://goo.gl/1KWxpN														[Spoilers ASOIAF] Bran's face when learning about R+L=I (x-post from r/photoshopbattles)	
RES_073	http://goo.gl/YM8YA													1	John Arryn's last words	



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RES_074	http://goo.gl/8EHCVU								1	1	1	1	1		<i>If meme stars were casting for Game of Thrones</i> 1 / Scumbag Steve would play Joffrey / McKayla is not impressed would play Queen Cersei / Trollface would play Jaime Lannister / The most interesting man in the world would play Tywin Lannister / Overly attached girlfriend would play Melisandre / Ridiculously photogenic guy would play Loras Tyrell / College liberal would play Daenerys Targaryen / Forever alone would be Ser Jorah Mormont / Overly manly man would play The Old Bear / Good guy Greg would play Ned Stark / Sad Keanu would play Robb Stark / Admiral Ackbar would play Catelyn Stark / Robb, its a trap! / Bad luck Brian would play Sansa Stark / Soon cat would play Arya Stark / Joffrey, Queen Cersei, The Mountain, The Hound, Ilyn Payne, The Tickler... / Sudden Clarity Clarence would play Bran Stark / Conspiracy Keanu would play Lord Varys / Success kid would play Petyr Baelish / Okay guy would play Jon Snow / Socially awkward penguin would play Samwell Tarly / Bitch please would play King Robert / Grumpy cat would play The Hound / Rageface would play The Mountain / Condescending Wonka would play Tyrion Lannister / Scumbag girl would play Shae / Suspicious third world kid would play Ygritte / And finally...pedobear would play Craster	Star Wars
RES_075	http://goo.gl/adYohG		1									1	1		What do we say to the god of meth? / Not even once	Breaking Bad
RES_076	http://goo.gl/Q19k6b								1				1		Buys you a lap dance / Pays the iron price	
RES_077	http://goo.gl/gTMSQN						1						1		Oh my sweet summer child / You know nothing	
RES_078	http://goo.gl/dlxk6H				1						1				Glorious book reading master race / Show peasant	
RES_079	http://goo.gl/FTJ8mQ		1												Theres more to the story but you probably heard enough already	Airplane
RES_080	http://goo.gl/qphQ3Q											1	1		Sansa has 4 brothers? That lucky bitch	
RES_081	http://goo.gl/XGTzRP		4												Some villains are seeking acceptance / Some turn into villains for the one they love / Some are following orders / Others are doing their job / And then there is this douche	(various villains from movies)
RES_083	http://goo.gl/O4vL2W								1						Gets pov chapter in next book / Prologue	
RES_084	http://goo.gl/Ov61D9		1						1						Shame of Cones	Disney [Up]
RES_085	http://goo.gl/6sgK9v		1										1	1	You will fly / Brandon Stark	Iron Man
RES_088	http://goo.gl/W2Djbp		1						1					1	I know that he is guilty. He and Sansa planned it together. - Shae / Why dont you go back to your home on whore island?	Anchorman
RES_089	http://goo.gl/CXmuYU					1									When you find someone / That you can discuss Game of Thrones with	
RES_090	http://goo.gl/Y0s3KB						1					1	1		dad you cant go around murdering people just so the band can play the rains of castamere / its a good song	
RES_091	http://goo.gl/HfFSO		1										1		King Slayer	Slayer
RES_092	http://goo.gl/90DsLK									1				1	How did I die? I wore my crown before it was cool	
RES_093	http://goo.gl/OxDQnG		1											1	You know what really grinds my gears? When people think Daenerys' name is actually Khaleesi	Family Guy
RES_094	http://goo.gl/XiRdgn											1	1	1	Aryal / Tywin New Roman / Comic Sansa	
RES_095	http://goo.gl/yu4EKo					1									Im glad there is no Game of Thrones episode this week so I can commemorate memorial day / Said noone ever	
RES_096	http://goo.gl/PkguQH					1									I should reread the series	
RES_097	http://goo.gl/Q9Sgg0												1	1	<b>Stannis Baratheon takes back the North</b>	
RES_098	http://goo.gl/WV2RST		1										1		Silly dwarves / Fire cannot kill a dragon	Hobbit
RES_099	http://goo.gl/QiUTbJ									1				1	Gets a job as a bartender / inn at the crossroads	
RES_100	http://goo.gl/zYozHJ							1		1		1	1		Thats a giant / Youve probably never seen one	
RES_101	http://goo.gl/tSmCu5							1				1	1		I heard the party / Died after I left	
RES_102	http://goo.gl/UkdGsr								1						Cant talk to book readers cause they inadvertently spoil things / Cant talk to non-readers cause they cant even remember character names	
RES_103	http://goo.gl/e1zaum												1		Downvote!	
RES_104	http://goo.gl/VtGcmN									1			1		Started reading ASOIAF books between seasons / Friends still hate Jaime	
RES_105	http://goo.gl/LfCo5d														Hey, you play that Cersei in Game of Thrones / And I was like yes yes / Youre are a f*** bitch	
RES_106	http://goo.gl/6ex9zl					1	1		1	1				1	Me and my pals watching the latest episode of GoT / Gee those Greyjoys have really bad clothes / They do not sew / LOL	
RES_107	http://goo.gl/XMHAXX		1				1						1	1	I am your king / I didnt vote for you / You dont vote for kings / Well how did you become king then? / The Lady of the Lake, her arm clad in the purest shimmering samite held aloft Excalbur from the bosom of the water / signifying by divine providence that I was to carry it! / Strange women distributing swords is no basis for a system of government! / You cant expect to wield supreme power just because some fiery tart threw a sword at you!	Monty Python and the Holy Grail
RES_108	http://goo.gl/yOXIUY									1					Am I the only one around here here / Who knows her name is Daenerys not Khaleesi	
RES_109	http://goo.gl/i1740Q							1						1	Im not saying it was dragons / But it was dragons	
RES_110	http://goo.gl/KbYt5J		1												The original Joffrey Baratheon	Disney [Robin Hood]
RES_111	http://goo.gl/EUS5xR												1		My name is Oberyn Martell / You killed my sister, prepare to die	
RES_113	http://goo.gl/r10HBL					1	1								<b>After reading the last Jon chapter in ADWD</b>	
RES_114	http://goo.gl/l9SV13						1				1			1	One day I met a man who boasted it was Tywin Lannister who truly ruled Westeros / Unfortunately I am the High King of Westeros / So I had his tongue cut out / One day some guy came to my castle demanding my son "come out and die" over some wolf bitch / Unfortunately I am the High King of Westeros / So I had both him and his father arrested and put on trial / The father demanded the trial by combat / Unfortunately I am the High King of Westeros / So I commanded that the champion he must face is fire...and burned him alive / Also I strangled the son to death as he watched his father burn	
RES_115	http://goo.gl/MjWhGJ		1			1									<b>[NO SPOILERS] Is he from house Stark? No? Are You Jamie Lannister?!</b>	Hasbro/ MiltonBradley [Guess Who game]
RES_117	http://goo.gl/BiFW6N						1						1		o no my lannister sense is tingling / ugh fuk / haaaaay girlfriend / watcha dooooin / writing a poem listen: / twinkle twinkle little star cersei is a fucking bitch	
RES_118	http://goo.gl/hmCvAX							1					1	1	Those shoes with that skirt?!	
RES_119	http://goo.gl/J9nP6m		1			1									<b>John Snow / public bar / salon</b>	John Snow pub
RES_120	http://goo.gl/wwOnKw							1				1			Dothraki wedding / Lets have it by the sea	
RES_121	http://goo.gl/3hrPKj								1				1		Youre a queen. You can do anything that you want / Im no queen Lord Baelish / Im astronaut	
RES_122	http://goo.gl/2EOzAr											1			Saan and Davos / In the moooorning	
RES_123	http://goo.gl/lq5KeA					1						1			After watching GoT s4e04 (Oathkeeper) / What was all that about? / GoT show fan / I dont know / ASOIAF reader / But...but...you read the books... / I dont fucking know	
RES_124	http://goo.gl/jAfKyl		1												<b>I was watching Black Hawk Down when suddenly...</b>	Black Hawk Down [Nikolaj Coster-Waldau]
RES_125	http://goo.gl/xLzCKF												1		#Tywinning	
RES_126	http://goo.gl/mqhU8P					1	1							1	Go to Skagos, ride a unicorn / And wait for this all to blow over	
RES_127	http://goo.gl/yQgucQ							1				1	1		Fought a lion...won / Fought a bear...won / Fought a hound...won / Brienne vs. Beasts: 3-0	
RES_128	http://goo.gl/RYXAUu		1											1	You know what really grinds my gears? People calling Daenerys "Khaleesi" as if thats her actual name	Family Guy
RES_129	http://goo.gl/LEmx0i		1					1					1		Snowblower / Snow blower	Honda
RES_130	http://goo.gl/Xs06L		1		1										You were supposed to reveal the Night's King to book readers first / not give filthy, casual show watchers info they cant possibly grasp the significance of	Star Wars
RES_132	http://goo.gl/ZYfhHk														[comments on the role of gay characters in GOT - both the film and books]	
RES_133	http://goo.gl/glfmc4		1	1											<b>[S3E09] Watching the last scene with my non-reader friends</b>	Survivor
RES_134	http://goo.gl/3Sly2									1					We paid for Joffrey's death / With Oberyn	
RES_135	http://goo.gl/wxd8u9													1	If khaleesi dies we riot / Challenge accepted	
RES_136	http://goo.gl/Xgd9w							1						1	I killed it off	
RES_138	http://goo.gl/3QMebE							1					1	1	If I was anymore inbred / I'd be a sandwich	
RES_139	http://goo.gl/zweIT7					1							1		Come at me bro	
RES_140	http://goo.gl/Zq1W15													1	Tywin / Tylose	
RES_141	http://goo.gl/uTX79V						1		1					1	If you cant leave after taking Night's Watch vows / Does it mean 'once you go black you cant go back'	
RES_142	http://goo.gl/geWw77		1												That romantic moment when you put your hands on your wife's face, rub it up and down, place your thumbs over her eyes, and say, "Ella Martell: I killed her children..."	Facebook
RES_143	http://goo.gl/LNZ4Mi									1					At least 2 or 3 winters are coming / Before TWOW comes out	
RES_145	http://goo.gl/xUNEyb			1										1	One hour on this planet is 7 years on Earth / Great, we will wait for TWOW here	Interstellar
RES_146	http://goo.gl/QkQwv5		1		1										Freys Hotel (I saw this in Stockholm - Anyone looking for a wedding venue?)	Freys Hotel (Stockholm)
RES_147	http://goo.gl/c37M04									1					Brace yourselves / The words of House Stark are no longer relevant now that winter has already come	
RES_148	http://goo.gl/QgN9IH						1		1						Am I the only one around here here / Who remembers Bran can walk in his dreams	
RES_149	http://goo.gl/4iTiic							1							This is Stannis Motherfucking Baratheon / Rightful King of the Raymar/ The Andals / The First Men / and Your Mother / Bend the knee or GTF0 / Pure. Fucking. Iron	
RES_151	http://goo.gl/jq5Usc		1											1	"Baratheon"	Austin Powers
RES_152	http://goo.gl/S6CWTw		1						1						If you read A Song Of Ice And Fire on an empty stomach / Youre gonna have a bad time	South Park



Id	URL (as of Feb 2, 2015)	commercial brand	media brand	brand branding	oppositional brand	ritual	meaning making	meaning appropriation	ritual template	fan art	comics, drawings, etc. from series	insider joke	fan art, mashup	picture text, or description (italics), or title (bold, italic)	Brand name
RES_153	http://goo.gl/4lIOM8		1						1				1	One does not simply / warg into Hodor	Lord of the Rings
RES_154	http://goo.gl/bCP-C5e		1				1						1	If you're having a good time / You're gonna have a bad time	South Park
RES_155	http://goo.gl/A8S8UC						1				1		1	The wedding in King's Landing was so beautiful / That even Joffrey choked up	
RES_156	http://goo.gl/bL5m6b						1						1	Kingslayer / Kinglayer / Kingplayer / Kingstrayer / Kingbetrayer / Kingfiller	
RES_159	http://goo.gl/kb5dKd										1		1	Imp-act / Varydana / Cambrei / Century schoolbook / [Microsoft Word symbols]	
RES_160	http://goo.gl/27FtzU					1	1							<b>Game of Farts (continued)</b>	
RES_161	http://goo.gl/oV8X5a						1				1			We will have our own adventures / With cannibals and unicorns	
RES_162	http://goo.gl/LQe8l	1										1		Kellogg's Raisin Bran	Kellogg's
RES_163	http://goo.gl/X79wvy					1	1			1	1			Me and my BF, GoT fans watched two seasons on TV. I have read AFFC and he is on Game of Thrones / BF: Is AFFC book 3 or 4? Me: Book 4. BF: Oh, so you have read the red wedding. / Me: What? Yes, but how did you get spoiled on that? BF: Oh, I looked it up. I had to know how Joffrey died. Me: Whats what you think the red wedding is? / You know nothing.	
RES_166	http://goo.gl/cGaRio											1		King in the North	
RES_167	http://goo.gl/4E1HFW								1			1		Im Bronn son of / You have probably never heard of him	
RES_168	http://goo.gl/vcQWks								1					My god... / My children are Lannisters!	
RES_169	http://goo.gl/393ZfE								1					Hey man / Got any more of those TWOW chapters?	
RES_171	http://goo.gl/g9TVgU						1				1	1		Sean Bean died in everything because its the universe trying to correct the hole ripped in it due to the fact his name doesn't rhyme when it should	
RES_172	http://goo.gl/sD1eTR		1		1									I see dead people	Sixth Sense
RES_173	http://goo.gl/cLFuS				1									Walter A. Frey funeral home private parking	Walter A. Frey funeral home
RES_176	http://goo.gl/Wg8YHL					1								That episode was / Mindblowing	
RES_177	http://goo.gl/1fmkED						1				1	1		Not sure if son / Or nephew	
RES_178	http://goo.gl/iZ3FEP	1	1		1									Blackfish ensures you'll never go to SeaWorld again [Link: <a href="http://www.indiewire.com/article/review-blackfish-ensures-youll-never-go-to-seaworld-again">http://www.indiewire.com/article/review-blackfish-ensures-youll-never-go-to-seaworld-again</a> ] / Go away	SeaWorld
RES_179	http://goo.gl/qkCQaQ											1		No! Stop touching me! / Im the night!	
RES_180	http://goo.gl/JSIOEK		1			1			1					If your direwolf is going nuts / You're gonna have a bad time	South Park
RES_181	http://goo.gl/77Ct29	2			1									Holy living fuck they killed Robb	AT&T, (Apple iPhone)
RES_182	http://goo.gl/0c5j1				1	1					1		1	I'll kill a man in a fair fight...or if I think he's gonna start a fair fight. Or if he bothers me. Or if theres a woman. Or if Im gettin' paid.	
RES_183	http://goo.gl/5VRxJ		1								1			Tyion / Lord Varys / Jon Snow [Jeopardy (game show) fan art]	(Jeopardy (game show))
RES_184	http://goo.gl/4f5byb		1		1	1			1			1		One does not simply / Going to ice Mordor	(Lord of the Rings)
RES_185	http://goo.gl/QN9ANk		1			1			1					If you're the right hand of the king / You're going to have a bad time	(South Park)
RES_186	http://goo.gl/11BWR8		1											Michael Bolton / Our blades are sharp	Michael Bolton
RES_187	http://goo.gl/9ZbBWP											1		I love playing / With snowballs	
RES_188	http://goo.gl/UdgHo7		1								1	1		Give the dwarves their mountain back! / But mom!	
RES_190	http://goo.gl/9KqG2										1			Master has presented Dobby with clothes! / Dobby is free!	Hobbit
RES_191	http://goo.gl/5fakv					1				1				<b>They might be related</b> [Grumpy cat and Daenerys]	
RES_192	http://goo.gl/IndWGK								1			1		<b>[S4E10] Stannis and the true believers of R'Daalwithit</b>	
RES_193	http://goo.gl/8JR5d													<b>Til that Caligula, the infamously cruel Roman Emperor, looked almost exactly like Jack Gleason (Joffrey).</b>	
RES_195	http://goo.gl/Y8mdOz				1	1					1			How do I even begin to explain Sansa Stark? / She is flawless. / She has claims on two Lordships Paramount and one Kingdom. / I hear her butt is insured for 10000 dragons / She does lemon cake commercials... / ...in the Reach / One time she met Ser Loras Tyrell...and he crowned her the Queen of Love and Beauty. / One time she slapped me. / It was awesome.	
RES_196	http://goo.gl/f0lq75											1		What do we say to the god of death? / #DontKillSeanBean	
RES_197	http://goo.gl/PUWZ6N				1									Guns dont kill people. / George R. R. Martin kills people	
RES_199	http://goo.gl/H0XPYM											1	1	The Roose is Loose	
RES_200	http://goo.gl/7nqHyj											1		Chris Christie? / Did you mother have a fucking stutter?	
RES_206	http://goo.gl/YRU9Pl				1				1			1		I sing in my church's choir / and instead of singing "The Lord" I often sing R'hllor	
RES_207	http://goo.gl/bw783n		1						1				1	After watching the last GoT promo, we are reporting character deaths to be in the hundreds of MILLIONS / The series is only known about 30 main characters, so this is quite devastating.	South Park
RES_209	http://goo.gl/Exercc		1									1	1	<b>Snoop Dragon</b>	Snoop Dogg
RES_212	http://goo.gl/Lp4r5G					1				1				(King's Landing, The Seven Kingdoms) Santa Fe, New Mexico / tap tap tap tap / Tyion / tap tap tap tap / Tryion / tap tap tap tap / aaahargh!	
RES_213	http://goo.gl/v2Dwj9								1					Lets just watch one more episode before bed / Red Wedding	
RES_214	http://goo.gl/wYQFh											1		Phillip... / Time to bring the empire back	
RES_278	http://goo.gl/DHsoix	1			1									West Seattle Nursery & Garden Centre / Winter is coming / Mulch your weinwood / Daily 9 to 6	West Seattle Nursery & Garden Centre
<b>MISCELLANEOUS (e.g. following related content / links present on sites in the basic sample)</b>															
<b>9GAG miscellaneous (Jan 26, 2015)</b>															
X_001	http://9gag.com/gag/4351708		1	1										Still a better love story than Twilight	Twilight
X_003	http://9gag.com/gag/4652939		1										1	<b>Just Ned Stark</b>	Iron Man
X_004	http://9gag.com/gag/a09K1PO								1				1	Died at first season / Still the headline	
X_005	http://9gag.com/gag/aBQZ8Bz					1	1						1	How Tyion Lannister looked like / If he was a Stark	
X_007	http://9gag.com/gag/anYVxp8						1				1			Hates his son because he is a whoring dwarf / Not gives a fuck about the incest of his twins	
X_008	http://9gag.com/gag/aVQ9P4v	7							1					Starcraft / Fifa 15 / Grand theft auto 5 / Spore / Minecraft / Game of Thrones / Skyrim / The Sims / "Now kiss"	Starcraft; Fifa15; GTA; Spore; Minecraft; Skyrim; The Sims
X_009	http://9gag.com/gag/awrqwnR					1							1	<b>The Stark girls</b>	
X_010	http://9gag.com/gag/a2Pzw7z	1												Jaime Lannister / Just pushed little Stark dude out of window...#LANNISTERSWAG / Viserys Targaryen likes this / Cersei Lannister / Dont post that to Facebook, you idiot! What if the Starks see it? / Jaime Lannister / Dont worry sister/girfriend, I would never accept friend request from a Stark! / Robb Stark / Um...you friended me... / Jaime Lannister / Shit this is awkward...I was just kidding by the way. I didnt push Bran out a window or anything. / Bran SwaggyStark / Dont listen 2 him Robb he pushed me and i fell out of the window and hes a bad guy who dates his sister / Robb Stark / Wait what? / Jaime Lannister / Silly Bran! Haha! Hes such a kiddier! / Robb Stark / You're a bastard Jaime / Jon Snow / Wow, we're pulling out the B word now? Really?	Facebook
X_011	http://9gag.com/gag/aZLYG1p									1				Game of Thrones farewell / Ned and friends / Across the Narrow Sea / The Red Wedding / The Wolves / Bye Theon, hello Reek / The Baratheons / The Red Viper / Battle at Castle Black / The Lion pays his debts	
X_012	http://9gag.com/gag/a3d0vqm		1								1		1	Cousin Ned! / Cousin Tony!	Iron Man
X_013	http://9gag.com/gag/818048										1			Ned, this morning a crow from the South came. / And what did he say? / Caw! Caw! Caw! Caw! Caw!	
<b>www.buzzfeed.com/ashleyperrez/got-jokes (Jan 27, 2015)</b>															
X_014	http://goo.gl/CQJhze					1					1			The Game of Thrones Cycle / This is the best show ever! / I think I found my new favourite character! / NOO!! WHY?! OH GOD!! WHY?! / I will never watch this stupid show ever again!	
X_015	http://goo.gl/CQJhze					1	1							You're a wonderful Sister and Mother	
X_016	http://goo.gl/CQJhze	1										1	1	Facebook / Add relationship / You cannot be in a relationship with your brother.	Facebook
X_018	http://goo.gl/CQJhze										1		1	"Join the Night's Watch" they said / "It will be fun" they said	
X_019	http://goo.gl/CQJhze		2		1	1							1	H.Potter fan: I wanna go to Hogwarts / LoTR Fan: I wanna go to the Shire / GoT fan: Naah man. Im good. Thanks.	Harry Potter; Lord of the Rings
X_020	http://goo.gl/CQJhze		1										1	<b>How the Khaleesi learned her craft</b>	How to Train Your Dragon
X_021	http://goo.gl/CQJhze							1				1	1	Those shoes with that dress?!!	
X_022	http://goo.gl/CQJhze		1										1	Iorah the explorer	Dora the Explorer
X_023	http://goo.gl/CQJhze												1	Westeros 7 year forecast / This year winter / The next winter / The next winter / The next winter / The next winter / The next winter / The next winter / 100 % chance of dragons	
X_024	http://goo.gl/CQJhze		1										1	Arya Stark in / Kill Ylin / & Ser Gregor / & Dunsen / & Polliver / & Raff the Sweetling / & The Thicker / & The Hound / & Ser Meryn / & King Joffrey / & Queen Cersei / Valar Morghulis	Kill Bill
X_025	http://goo.gl/CQJhze											1		A man must add highlights	
X_026	http://goo.gl/CQJhze	1										1		Sometimes I feel like my head is being crushed by a mountain / Thats when I reach for an Exedrin Migrane	Excedrin
X_027	http://goo.gl/CQJhze		1						1					You sit on a throne of lies	The Elf
X_028	http://goo.gl/CQJhze					1					1	1		Khaleesi, believe me: you cannot trust Daario. He killed his captains. / No, trust me. He changed. Its no longer the same person!	
X_029	http://goo.gl/CQJhze		1		1							1	1	Imagine all the people living life in peace / hahahahaha	Elton John

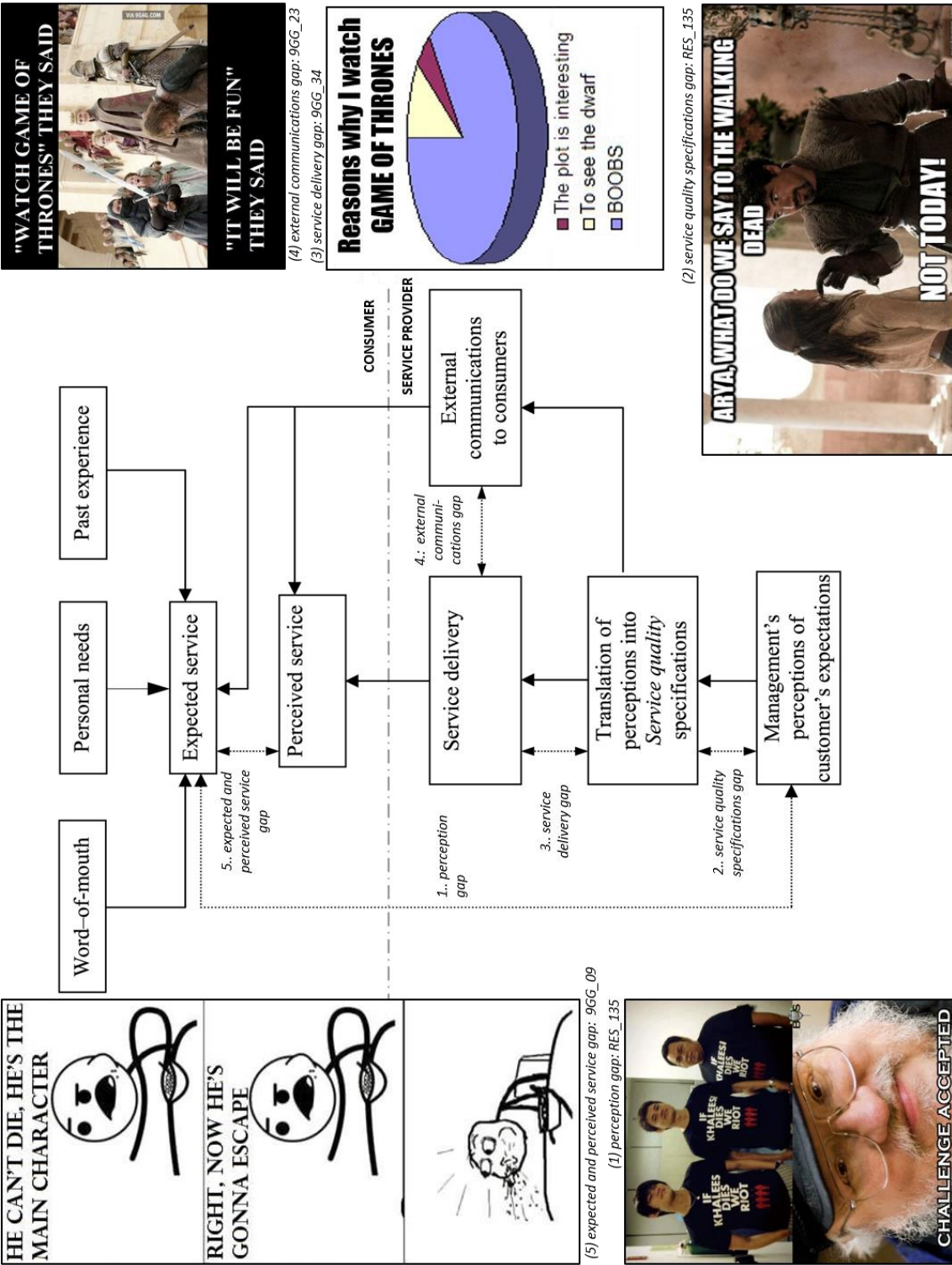
Id	URL (as of Feb 2, 2015)	commercial brand	media brand	brand branding	oppositional brand	ritual	meaning making	meaning appropriation	memes	template	fan art	comics, drawings, etc. from series	insider joke	remix, mashup	picture text, or description (italic), or title (bold, italic)	Brand name
X_030	http://goo.gl/CQJhze	1					1						1		George R. R. Martin @ GRRM_ / Im in a rush to finish the next book, so the entire second half will be written from Hodor's perspective	Twitter
X_031	http://goo.gl/CQJhze												1		People you can trust more than yourself / People you can rely on / People that are unpredictable / People that can NOT be trusted / People that should be avoided at all times / Satan / Petyr Baelish	
X_033	http://goo.gl/CQJhze				1								1		Read the books: / Hasnt read the books.	
X_035	http://goo.gl/CQJhze		1				1								And Daario Naharis? / (Taylor Swift plays in the distance)	Taylor Swift
X_036	http://goo.gl/CQJhze												1		Friendzone / Level 99	
www.buzzfeed.com/lyspaiater/things-youll-only-get-if-you-watch-game-of-thrones (Jan 27, 2015)																
X_037	http://goo.gl/fmwvOz		1				1								Special guest star Lady Gaga	Lady Gaga
X_038	http://goo.gl/fmwvOz					1									Where are my dragons? / Call Jorah (send a raven)	
X_039	http://goo.gl/fmwvOz		1												A Lannister always pays his debts. (MasterCard)	Mastercard
X_041	http://goo.gl/fmwvOz		1											1	Kellogg's Raisin Bran	Kellogg's
X_043	http://goo.gl/fmwvOz		1											1	And the Lannisters too	Snuggie
X_045	http://goo.gl/fmwvOz		1											1	What is this sorcery?	Apple
X_046	http://goo.gl/fmwvOz								1			1	1		Winter is coming / Those are the words of our house / What do you Starks say when its winter? / ... / Told you so.	
X_047	http://goo.gl/fmwvOz					1									The Game of Thrones / You have unknowingly felt up your own sister. Go back 3 spaces in shame / Totally inappropriate for the whole family!	
X_048	http://goo.gl/fmwvOz								1					1	when boys are like a brother to you	
http://gameoflaughs.tumblr.com/ (Jan 27, 2015)																
X_051	http://goo.gl/H8vWic		1				1						1		Now youre just somebody / that I used to know.	Gotye
X_052	http://goo.gl/QzV2r		1			1									Lose track of time playing Diablo 3 / Forget to watch Game of Thrones	Diablo3
X_053	http://goo.gl/z0FeTh								1					1	Sex is too mainstream / Also, I dont know where to put it.	
X_054	http://goo.gl/jBEcmj								1						Brace yourselves / Drunk text messages are coming	
X_055	http://goo.gl/6NHD2a		1												I am Daenerys Targaryen. The Dragonborn. / Bitch please	Skyrim
X_056	http://goo.gl/AtBCpt		2										1		Tyrian / We really need to talk about your plans for my daughter. / We need to create some more debts to collect. Leveraging your daughter is the only way to do so. Not a lot of people are liking Joffrey's reign / You're such a jerk. Its no wonder that EVERYONE in the family hates you. / I consider myself blessed. I know what Lannisters do with family they LIKE	AT&T (Apple iPhone))
X_057	http://goo.gl/2mPCir		4										1	1	Vaseline / Loreal The Wall / Loreal Casterly Rock / Maybelline Dothraki Edition / Maybelline Bastard Edition / Loreal Tarth / Loreal Highgarden / Clairol	Vaseline; L'oréal; Maybelline; Clairol
X_058	http://goo.gl/VNDmtaE						1						1	1	Fans are complaining about my looks / Same here / Theyre sayin' "Too pretty"	
X_059	http://goo.gl/5wCBN		1												Summer is coming [Starbucks board]	Starbucks
X_060	http://goo.gl/zvFicx													1	1st rule of birth control pills: Do not stop taking birth control pill / 2nd rule of birth control pills: Do NOT STOP taking birth control pill	
X_061	http://goo.gl/V6iIG7						1		1			1			The next time we see each other, we will talk about your mother, I promise / We will speak when I return / We'll talk when I return from the hunt	
X_062	http://goo.gl/106TNO						1		1				1	1	A series of / Unfortunate events	
X_063	http://goo.gl/C8uaaX											1			Go hunting / Ruin everything for everyone / Wealthy knight that could have any woman / Sleep with sister / Feel impatient / Threaten army of bloodthirsty warriors / Impregnated by brother 3 times / Happy about it / Member of prestigious house / Dedicate life to freezing and not having sex / Suspect Tyrian of crime based on circumstantial evidence / Start a war / Promise mother not to climb / Climb tower / Command army of fierce warriors / Die to infected booboo	
X_064	http://goo.gl/y1MTfn		1						1			1	1	1	What do we say to Windows Update / Not today	Microsoft (Windows)
X_065	http://goo.gl/ASHV6S		4											1	Select Payment Method / Iron Price / American Express / Discover / MasterCard / Visa	American Express; Discover; MasterCard; Visa
X_066	http://goo.gl/MDJXck			1										1	Khal me maybe	Carly Rae Jepsen
X_067	http://goo.gl/mluPTC												1		Fandom / Me	
X_068	http://goo.gl/0tS6VP			1											R Bolton / #1 Westeros Times Bestseller / Fifty shades of Flay	Fifty Shades of Gray
X_069	http://goo.gl/7gJSU										1				To those who would stand in my way, beware my approach! / For I am the mother of dragons! And the queen of horses! And the sister of bears! / And the best friend of chipmunks! / And she is the niece of particularly nasty chinchilla. / Yes. Thank you for reminding me about uncle Fluffy. / I love you.	
X_070	http://goo.gl/wWANbw						1		1						What do we say to the god of death? / Take Sean Bean instead	
X_071	http://goo.gl/wr3tVY											1			How to describe Game of Thrones to different people / Parents / Its like the west wing, but set in the medieval times, you would love it. / Cool friend. / Bro, ladies are getting mad sexed on this show like all the time always / Nerdy friend / Bro, ladies are getting mad sexed on this show like all the time always. Also? Dragons. / Girlfriend. / Come on, there are some really cute wolf-puppies in the first episode. / Co-worker / And thats why I named my fantasy basketball team "ball drogo"	
X_072	http://goo.gl/d06t2V		1	1									1		Mumford and Sons - Little Lion Man / Obviously an ode to Tyrian Lannister	Youtube; Mumford and Sons
X_073	http://goo.gl/C3V2is						1		1				1	1	A new original series from HBO / #1 New York Times bestselling author / George R. R. Martin / Dont get too attached	
X_074	http://goo.gl/mCEQUT								1						Is it just me or... / Definitely not just you! (Grumpy cat)	
X_075	http://goo.gl/ZtHu54														Night's Watch Genuine Draft / Baratheon's Pub Ale / Winterfell beer / Targaryen / Lannister Gold / Greyjoy Beer [spoo! beer brands]	
X_076	http://goo.gl/rxzl2F			1				1						1	My girlfriend is dead, all people think im a bad guy. What can I do? / Join the Night's Watch...and take the black. / My watch begins.	Batman
X_077	http://goo.gl/VfFL2O			1					1						Brace Yourselves / Santa Claus is coming (to town)	Santa Claus Is Coming to Town (1934 song)
X_078	http://goo.gl/Zfr5sC		1				1							1	Facebook / Add relationship / You cannot be in a relationship with your sister. / Are you kidding me? Why not?	Facebook
X_079	http://goo.gl/OxbBAK			1										1	Dancing with the Starks	Dancing with the Stars
X_080	http://goo.gl/chWexe		1				1							1	And did you pay the IRON PRICE for that? / You can't buy fatherly love. For everything else, there is...MasterCard.	Mastercard
X_081	http://goo.gl/8qhMiS		1												Night Watch Bros	Nintendo (Super Mario Bros.)
X_082	http://goo.gl/1P6prQ		1										1	1	Dead Crow bourbon flavoured beer	Dead Crow beer
X_083	http://goo.gl/2Mi4g9					1			1						Watched new Game of Throne episode / Favorite character still alive	
X_084	http://goo.gl/73v6cy					1									George R. R. Martin / A Storm of Swords (bloodbath)	
X_085	http://goo.gl/NtJDW5														Got thrown into a bear cage / Walked out with a new coat / Brought knife to a gun fight / Won / They judged me with their eyes / I judged them with my sword / Got pulled over by a cop / Let him off with warning / Keep your friends close / But your enemies six feet under / Why ask guys out / When I can tell them / Knocked on death's door / his rent was due / Went for a walk / In Mordor	
X_086	http://goo.gl/WY5iTy		1											1	Bacon is coming	McDonald's
X_087	http://goo.gl/CTCwiv			1		1								1	Normal people in this time of year: "25 days until Christmas!" / Me this time of year: "118 days until GoT season 4!"	The Elf
X_088	http://goo.gl/PCWp6V												1	1	I may look calm / But in my head I've killed you 3 times	
X_089	http://goo.gl/plxNau		1											1	Hound	KFC
X_090	http://goo.gl/kFuY2o											1			Definitely printing this Joffrey target out for my next day at the range.	
X_091	http://goo.gl/joU69u						1	1			1				Winter is coming! / For god's sake Ned! We have just arrived! / Stark syndrome: the disability to enjoy summer, only because you know it will end at some point	
X_092	http://goo.gl/j0r5zy		1				1							1	Game of Thrones Facebook recap / Season 3 episode 1 / Recent activity / Samwell Tarly has run 200 yards from White Walkers using RunKeeper / Samwell Tarly: My longest run ever! / Jeor Mormont: Did you that send on the ravens? / Samwell Tarly: Saved to drafts. Was busy trying to complete the Walking Dead finale. / Jeor Mormont posted a photo from tumblr: You had one job! / Ser Bronn has checked in to Some Whore's Thong / Tyrian: Dude get over here I need you. / Ser Bronn: But boobs! / Tyrian: Now. / Davos Seaworth is attending to Rescue Brunch - with Salladhor Saan / Davos Seaworth: Stannis will fight again. We just need to get rid of Melissandre. / Salladhor Saan: You mean the woman who can queef assassins? Nopel. / Littlefinger Baelish has invited Sansa Stark to An Obviously Sexual Journey On The Ocean / Ros: Hey Shae, just from one good whore to another, you know thats really fucked up, right? / Shae: If she wants to trust a pimp who betrayed her dead, I cant help her. / Daenerys Targaryen commented on an article: Another Cruise Ship Disaster - Ocean Liner Plagued By Fire-Breathing Dragons And Vomiting Dothraki / Daenerys Targaryen: Im on this ship and its not a disaster! We are fine! / Ser Jorah Mormont: Not that fine. You havent smelled puke until you have smelled Dothraki puke	Facebook

Id	URL (as of Feb 2, 2015)	Brand name												Brand name
		commercial brand	media brand	anti-branding, oppositional brand	ritual	meaning making	meaning generation	prere	template	fan art (comics, drawings, etc)	scene from series	insider joke	sex, madup	
picture text, or description [italic], or title [bold, italic]														
Reddit misc (/r/funny, search:thrones, first 200 posts visioned, brand-related extracted) (Jan 26, 2015)														
X_093	http://goo.gl/QnUJow	1			1				1				um. / Ahem / taptaptap / www.bigtimeawesometorrentbucket.com / Game of Thrones full season HD / Are you sure about this? Now instead of the author getting paid, the money is going to those sleazy advertisers. Also, this is illegal, and Im not sur- Oh wow look at how fast its downloading! That was really easy. / click / Man...Prince Joffrey is a douche and the Queen is a total CuntHammer *omsnackchewchew* / Amen to that good buddy *crunch munch crunch* Duchiest. Prince. EVER	Apple
X_094	http://goo.gl/sThHLC												Just give him the fucking Emmy already / For your consideration / Peter Dinklage	
X_095	http://goo.gl/tkxotw				1								<b>How I feel about Game of Thrones premiere tonight</b>	
X_096	http://goo.gl/bO583K				1			1	1	1			How I feel when reading / George R. R. Martin - A Game of Thrones / Oh boy, the chapters coming to an end. I wonder, whose story will be told in the next chapter? / Will it be the tale of Lord Eddard, as he juggles morality, friendship and power in a struggle to save the kingdom he loves? / Or will it be the cunning bastard Jon Snow as he adjust to life on the cold desolate wall, protecting the realm from unknown horrors? / Or perhaps Tyrion Lannister, the sharp witted Imp, whose lack of stature is certainly made up for in humor and penchant for trouble? / Maybe we will check in across the vast sea, where Dragon Queen Daenerys amasses an army of barbarians under her powerful warlord husband? / I wonder how Bran is doing, paralyzed in the confines of his Winterfell home, dreaming of running free with his fierce dire wolf companion? / Perchance we will hear from Catelyn Stark, who is struggling to avenge the assault on her son Bran, and struggling to cope with the coming war across the Seven Kingdoms? / Or maybe we will how young Arya Stark's sword lessons are going, as she strives to be a warrior and equal to any man, despite her young age? / Oh god, who's it going to be? / Sansa / My sister cant kni! ...I love Joffrey! ...But I love him! ...I am telling Septa on you! ...Oh my sister is so annoying!! / FFFFFFFFUUUUUUUUUU	
X_097	http://goo.gl/b8Xc6w				1	1			1				Khaleesi, you have not been naked in seven moons...the peopl expect it.	
X_098	http://goo.gl/LxzHtN								1				Thing I have learned from Game of Thrones / Winter is coming / Jon Snow knows nothing / Hodor	
X_099	http://goo.gl/nr6sq4												<b>As someone who doesn't watch Game of Thrones, this is my reaction to all the posts today about the new episode.</b>	
X_102	http://goo.gl/bqbCj0	1										1	Game of Thrones / Westeros [GTA-style]	GTA
X_103	http://goo.gl/yTsdN2		1									1	<b>Game of Thrones/ Family Guy crossover drawings. (Season 3 Spoilers)</b>	Family Guy
X_105	http://goo.gl/w7K91u	1			1								Twitter is dark / And full of spoilers	Twitter
Google Images (first 15-20 findings observed, various keywords - search: "george rr martin meme", "scumbag george rr martin", "winter is coming meme" + related images deemed complementary); pinterest sites (various dates)														
X_106	http://goo.gl/h9q8Z							1					Brace yourselves / Knowledge is coming	
X_107	http://goo.gl/DEfOI	2						1					Brace yourself / Pizza is coming	HP; Domino's Pizza
X_108	http://goo.gl/A882fg							1					Brace yourself / Facebook statuses about snow are coming	
X_109	http://goo.gl/Eqxzhg	1						1					Brace yourselves / We ran out of Nutella	Nutella
X_110	http://goo.gl/eibHvd	1	1								1	1	Cant believe I wanted to fuck my sister. / I hear ya bro... / Just do it.	Nike; Star Wars
X_111	http://goo.gl/PLKZWq				1	1		1					Never watched Game of Thrones. / Already knows who wins	
X_112	http://goo.gl/eibHvd												Im dead. Get over it. Move on.	
X_113	http://goo.gl/FzUuXi							1					You know a characted is awesome. / When people still talk about him several seasons after his death.	
X_115	http://goo.gl/ZNKQR1							1					But how can you let Sansa marry someone like Joffrey? / *shit she's got a point. Quick, say something clever* / Winter is coming	
X_116	http://goo.gl/2kaPR7				1	1				1			The most beautiful thing / You will ever see	
X_117	http://goo.gl/Te5403				1					1			Red Wedding / Not bad by Dothraki standards	
X_118	http://goo.gl/wnfdo5	1			1					1			Katniss and Gale / Survivors in the wild / Thats cute	Hunger Games
X_119	http://goo.gl/tuw1Qg										1	1	She loves me like a brother / I wish I was a Targaryen	
X_120	http://goo.gl/AGW0JO					1							#1 New York Times bestselling author / George R. R. Martin / Yes, that guy dies too	
X_121	http://goo.gl/tk7pBR		1				1				1	1	This is the spirit of my father? / No, this is the spirit of my brother Roberth from House Baratheon	Harry Potter
X_122	http://goo.gl/A9uHrR		1	1		1							Joffrey is dead... / Its finally over	Lord of the Rings
X_123	http://goo.gl/zGm44n		1					1					Why the fuck / Have I not seen a single Game of Thrones meme since I started watching it to understand the memes	Star Trek
X_124	http://goo.gl/e2m4B1		1		1			1					What the fuck? Did that really just happen / on Game of Thrones?	Star Trek
X_125	http://goo.gl/2rfdli			1	1						1		We'll miss him / Said noone ever	
X_126	http://goo.gl/2Lvt4D									1	1	1	Take this, Joffrey! / Im telling mom!	
X_127	http://goo.gl/MF1Q2v		1		1								Admit it / You wanted Joffrey dead / More than Voldemort	Harry Potter
X_128	http://goo.gl/zB2L18						1				1		Dat dress	
X_129	http://goo.gl/SY02Yf		1		1	1							1 If you / kill her / I will find you / and I will kill you	Taken
X_131	http://goo.gl/11ljdg		1	1	1							1	Game of Thrones / Youre gonna suffer / But youre gonna be happy about it	Harry Potter
X_132	http://goo.gl/9Ued3P	1					1	1					House Stark / House Blend / Coffee is brewing	Starbucks
X_133	http://goo.gl/FWgdv5												since 1986 Sean Bean has died in over 20 films and tv productions / he has been brutally killed by / bow and arrows handgun revolver shotgun machine gun bayonet satellite crushing freezing slashing cow stampeade hanging live burial impaling beheading drowning exploding stabbing dismemberment cloning and other dangers	
X_134	http://goo.gl/9vyUIW			1						1			Who else / is counting episodes till this guy is dead?	
X_135	http://goo.gl/sf77OCT				1						1		Always be yourself / Unless you can be Khaleesi / Then always be Khaleesi	
X_136	http://goo.gl/NwpPEh		1			1							Thinks life is a song / Finds out its Metallica	Metallica
X_137	http://goo.gl/CpyTbw			1									Guess who wrote the latest episode of Family Guy?	Family Guy
X_138	http://goo.gl/PdERIU			1									Crea 200 personajes para sus libros / mata a los protagonistas / George R. R. Martin / Trolleando desde 1948	
X_139	http://goo.gl/xxTWyq			1		1					1	1	Im a the best killer there is. / No I am. / Thats cute / Bitch please	
X_140	http://goo.gl/g2ugsB			1							1		Every single time someone asks me how much til next book... / I kill a Stark.	
X_141	http://goo.gl/AhpFOW	1		1									Why doesnt George R. R. Martin use twitter? / Because he already killed all 140 characters.	Twitter
X_142	http://goo.gl/GnJ8fR			1									Have a favorite character? / Not any more.	
X_143	http://goo.gl/RPIAh0		1	1				1					Oh, you like Game of Thrones? / Tell me, who is your favorite character?	Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory
X_144	http://goo.gl/S7wMx8			1		1		1					Youre all forgetting the most tragic person that can die before my series ends / Me	
X_146	http://goo.gl/5cv7NT		1		1			1					Kill them! Kill them! Kill them all!	Simpsons
X_147	http://goo.gl/B4KaZt		1		1								I noticed you have favorite character in Game of Thrones / I too like to live dangerously	Austin Powers
X_149	http://goo.gl/F2y2sz			1									My biggest dream was to ruin the lives of my readers and crush their soul	
X_150	http://goo.gl/YrBf7K			1									This is what pain feels like motherfuckers.	
X_151	http://goo.gl/bw9PBK		1								1		"@ GeorgeR Martin hasnt tweeted yet / Probably because / He killed all 140 characters	Twitter
X_152	http://goo.gl/7SPSmz		1		1			1					What if the character George R. R. Martin kills next is / himself	Keanu Reeves
X_153	http://goo.gl/yziJmeI			1									Fuck you / George R. R. Martin	
X_154	http://goo.gl/3Bsh5a			1									All hipsters / must die!	
X_157	http://goo.gl/xmV3PZ			1									George R. R. Martin / The only writer to not give a fuck about killing the main character!	
X_158	http://goo.gl/5Svh7y			1									Dead characters! / Dead characters everywhere!	
X_159	http://goo.gl/GzQJ5W	1									1		Every single time someone asks me how much til next book... / I kill a Stark. / here's my home address: 10880 Malibu Point, 90265. I'll leave the door unlocked.	Iron Man
X_160	http://goo.gl/16NX2l		1	1							1	1	What the hell do you think this is? Game of Thrones?	Star Wars
X_161	http://goo.gl/yv0Tg1								1				Live your life / like a character that George R. R. Martin may kill unexpectedly	
X_162	http://goo.gl/2LYf0c												When you play the game of thrones / You win or you die	
X_163	http://goo.gl/g2JkF1			1									I dont always kill my main characters / But when I do...o.k.yeah. I always do.	
X_164	http://goo.gl/6pwh3L				1							1	What part of "Valar Morghulis" / did you bitches not understand?	
X_165	http://goo.gl/cMQoBK				1	1			1				Holy shit! The Hound vs. Brienne? Who would have thought that? You always surprise me bro! / Well, to be honest I didnt... / Damn! And now Cersei is confessing the twincest of her dad! / Youre a genius man!	
X_166	http://goo.gl/EXqJOR			1									Because fuck you / Thats why	
X_167	http://goo.gl/rfXEIUC				1				1				Khuu! Khuu! Khuu!	
X_168	http://goo.gl/nii8jCE			1						1	1	1	Jaquen H'ghar. I have a job for you. / Say the name and it will be done. / Geogre R. R. Martin / Fuck! / Revenge!	
X_170	http://goo.gl/rsNja5		1	1							1	1	George / Run / You fools!	Lord of the Rings
X_171	http://goo.gl/u8DqCp			1									Only notable actor in the massively popular tv show? / Kill them cause fuck you thats why	
X_172	http://goo.gl/w1owuWj			1									Seriously guys / I love weddings	
X_173	http://goo.gl/5SOetg			1									Having trouble remembering all the character names? / Let me help!	
X_174	http://goo.gl/XszbiC			1									I dont always kill characters / but when I do, theyre your favorites	
X_175	http://goo.gl/Hq6wC							1					Brace yourself / Spring is not coming	
X_176	http://goo.gl/gYeBrd		1								1	1	Brother, everyone keeps saying 'winter is coming'. What on Middle Earth could they mean? / Beats me	Lord of the Rings

id	URL (as of Feb 2, 2015)	commercial brand	media brand	brand branding	oppositional brand	ritual	meaning making	meaning appropriation	memes	template	fan art	comics, drawings, etc. from series	insider joke	remix, mashup	picture text, or description [italic], or title [bold, italic]	Brand name
X_177	http://goo.gl/Hmm1wh									1					Brace yourselves / Winter is coming (no, really. Winter literally starts tomorrow.)	
X_178	http://goo.gl/Xm0ma										1				During Autumntime... / Brace yourselves, winter is coming / During Wintertime... / I fucking hate winter / During Springtime... / I fucking hate spring / During Summertime... / I fucking hate summer	
X_179	http://goo.gl/Vbg6KU		1												OMG! You killed Sean Bean! Again! You bastards!	South Park
X_180	http://goo.gl/MQ72ZJ														Gyün a zimankó	
X_181	http://goo.gl/TISaHc		1												Gondor has no king, / Yeah well... neither does Winterfell	Lord of the Rings
X_182	http://goo.gl/Z48kW3														Brace yourselves / All the jokes about winter is coming are coming	
X_183	http://goo.gl/Rcp0qH														Live your life / like a character that George R. R. Martin would kill off unexpectedly	
X_186	http://goo.gl/8nD4nF	1													Catelyn Stark has captured Jaime Lannister / Jaime Lannister: Well, this is weird. Usually Cersei is the one tied up. / Catelyn Stark: That's because your sister cant close her legs / Jaime Lannister: Yeah, well, either your son, Bran / Catelyn Stark:... / Jaime Lannister: Too soon?	Facebook
X_188	http://goo.gl/8nD4nF		1				1								If you are in an epic story, be sure to become friend of the guy called Sam / And you will certainly have a real friend	Lord of the Rings
X_189	http://goo.gl/8nD4nF		1			1									The moment you realize / Filch had Hermione's mother killed	Harry Potter
X_191	http://goo.gl/8nD4nF		4	1											Some villains are only following orders / While others turn into villains for the people they love / Some are villains because its their job / Some villains are just looking for acceptance / And then there is this cunt	(various villains from movies)
X_193	http://goo.gl/rHKT3x	1										1			This type of shit is why I burn people	Facebook
X_194	http://goo.gl/pLgoxS	1										1			<b>Game of Thrones Lego</b>	Lego
X_197	http://goo.gl/fE3e3L				1										Brace yourselves / Tips are coming ( <b>How Game of Thrones fans leave tips @Brian Flanagan Flanagan Flanagan Gulla Start drawing!</b> )	
X_198	http://goo.gl/iObx9d				1						1				[brochure of Dubrovnik based on GOT locations]	
X_199	http://goo.gl/iObx9d		1									1			A man needs / A name / Chuck Norris / A man prefers to remain jailed	Chuck Norris
X_200	http://goo.gl/iObx9d		1	1			1						1	1	Always make the audience suffer as much as possible - Alfred Hitchcock / Great advice	Alfred Hitchcock
X_201	http://goo.gl/gN5wAJ		1										1	1	Love is / an open door	Disney [Frozen]
X_202	http://goo.gl/AEikR2		1											1	<b>Separated at birth Game of thrones humor.</b>	Disney [Lion King]
X_203	http://goo.gl/iObx9d		1												who come noone ever talks about how hans was about to hunt elsa's fucking head off / its like every character in the movie was g-rated disney, except for hans, hans literally came straight out of game of thrones / the southern isles send their regards	Disney [Frozen]
X_204	http://goo.gl/iObx9d		1									1			Brilliant! The owl post is here! / Is that a... a raven? / Ned, even as I write these words, I fear for my very life. I have discovered a woeful secret about the King lineage. I mustnt disclose anything here, but know, that the seed is strong. You must come to King's Landing all haste I fear I have little time. Jon Aryn / What was it? / Eh, just junkmail... / Elsewhere / What in the seven hells is Hogwarts?	Harry Potter
X_205	http://goo.gl/iObx9d		9	1											Some people like these villains / Some people love these villains / but / in all of television / in all of history of movies / we / all / hate / this / mother / fucker	(various villains from movies)
X_209	http://goo.gl/iObx9d		1				1						1	1	Marry me and I will give you the seven kingdoms / and our children will be princes and princesses	Nicky Minaj
X_210	http://goo.gl/iObx9d		1				1							1	winter is coming / stark / hear roar / lannister / ours is the fury / baratheon / fire blood / targaryen / family duty honor / tully / growing strong / tyrell / unbowed unbent unbroken / martell / we do not sow / greyjoy	Disney
X_211	http://goo.gl/ugIQ0M	1													Lannister Card / A Lannister always pays his debts	Mastercard
X_212	http://goo.gl/nx2kAK				1										Where is he taking the baby? / Hey, this wasnt in the books... / Mother of God!	
X_213	http://goo.gl/ITWP6s						1					1	1		We need to follow that three eyed raven, Hodor. Who knows to which magical place it will take us / "Welcome to Chernobyl"	
X_214	http://goo.gl/ZAbm5N							1							disobeys mom about climbing / Resulting chain of events lead to war throughout his nation and his father being killed / listen to your mother!	
X_215	http://goo.gl/hzPqhh						1								Trónok Harca / pornó - extra harcjelentekkel	
X_216	http://goo.gl/egTjBy									1					Brace yourselves / I wont be in season 3 either	
X_217	http://goo.gl/eaEL2L				1						1				When I talk about Game of Thrones to my friends / me / them	
X_218	http://goo.gl/R6VxEe						1					1	1		Whats worse than a Game of Thrones wedding? / A divorce	
X_219	http://goo.gl/KTcrTy						1								If you hated the character / It means that the actor did a great job	
X_220	http://goo.gl/ZLudKp						1					1			[Game of Thrones / A History of Ice and Fire / The fictional world of Game of Thrones, with all its spectacular locations, battles and family feuds...]	
X_221	http://goo.gl/gaVtwx												1		Wait! / Grass fed right?	
X_222	http://goo.gl/hC48mX									1	1				I am torn as to what I should do next / go. To. Westeros. / Who are you? / Westeros, that way, where every other storyline is. / Are you mad? You want me to abandon the slaves to their fate? / Listen. The plight of the slaves here is very, very sad. But noone cares. At all. / Westeros? Cool place, with ice zombies, ripe for the dragon firing. A bunch of pretty much identical desert cities? Snorefest. / You would have me betray for those who placed their hopes in me? / The iron throne is ripe for the taking! The king is a kid who spend all of his time with a cat. Its a really adorable cat n all but still -- / Never! I must prove my ability to rule before claiming the--- / uuuuuhhhh fine i guess i will have to go for plan b / All hail, his majesty...King Ser Pounce, the first of his name/species. / Shame about what happened to Tommen at the beige-wedding	
X_223	http://goo.gl/zWnz43		1		1					1					One cannot simply interest / without stumbling upon Game of Thrones spoilers	Lord of the Rings
X_224	http://goo.gl/K2JasE	1					1			1			1		I dont always have sex / But when I do, its with my sister	Dos Equis
X_225	http://goo.gl/K2JasE											1	1		Da f** mah dragons at?	
X_226	http://goo.gl/K2JasE						1								Like a boss	
X_227	http://goo.gl/K2JasE	1					1		1						I dont always have girlfriends / But when I do, its with a fire immune, dragon mom's that command armies of nippleless badasses	Dos Equis
X_228	http://goo.gl/K2JasE						1								I am naked, fireproof and covered in dragons / Your argument is invalid.	
X_229	http://goo.gl/K2JasE						1					1	1		Teases you for knowing nothing / Thinks a windmill is a Lord's Castle	
X_230	http://goo.gl/K2JasE		1	1											Jabba made me wear a gold bikini / Thats cute	Star Wars
X_231	http://goo.gl/K2JasE												1		They said I could be anything / So I became a douche	
X_232	http://goo.gl/K2JasE									1			1		I worship the old gods / you have probably never heard of them	
X_233	http://goo.gl/K2JasE												1		If i was anymore inbred / I'd be a sandwich	
X_234	http://goo.gl/K2JasE												1		friendzooone	
X_235	http://goo.gl/K2JasE				1								1		You look like my sister / If you come up North for me, I'll go down South on you / Your name must be Winter because you're about to coming / I'll stick you with the pointy end	
X_236	http://goo.gl/zOmX57	1													Khaleesi lyche / an official flavor of / foursquare / Game of Cones	Foursquare
X_237	http://goo.gl/3EK60v									1					Summer is coming (Ray Ban)	Ray-Ban
X_238	http://goo.gl/R7ncAu		1												Game of Thrones / for those who cant deal with the sunny optimism of "the walking dead"	Walking Dead
X_239	http://goo.gl/ouvu1M									1					custom marketing is coming	
X_241	http://goo.gl/E4782	1													Brace yourselves / pumpkin spice is coming [Starbucks board]	Starbucks
X_242	http://goo.gl/1iust2	1													Winter is coming! / You know what keeps me warm other than this beard in November? [Starbucks board]	Starbucks
X_243	http://goo.gl/DCNB7U		1											1	Khaleesi / gotta hatch 'em all	Pokémon
X_245	http://9gag.com/gag/a1AvP62/	1													Share a Coke with Hodor	Coca-Cola
X_246	http://goo.gl/eVRbNh		1										1	1	<b>Miley Cyrus On Game Of Thrones</b>	Miley Cyrus
X_247	http://goo.gl/AX222D							1							Brutal sword solo	
X_249	http://goo.gl/dkX9w1	1													Game of Thrones / Blonde ale	Ommegang brewery

Annex 2. Illustrations

Figure 42. An example of the use of traditional marketing models in a qualitative study: The services gaps model in the Game of Thrones memes



Source: Own collection based on Parasuraman et al. (1985: 44), Bauer et al. (2009: 183-184)



### Annex 3. List of publications by the author in the dissertation's topic

#### Refereed journal articles (in English):

1. Csordás, T., & Gáti, M. (2014). The New (Marketing) Role of Firms as Media Content Providers - The case of SME's Strategic Social Media Presence, *Vezetéstudomány / Budapest Management Review*, 45(3) 22-32.
2. Csordás, T. (2013). The new role of consumer meanings and legitimacy in building marketing value. *Economists' Forum / Közgazdász Fórum*, 16(6) 27-48. URL: [http://epa.oszk.hu/00300/00315/00107/pdf/EPA00315\\_kozgazdasz\\_2013\\_06\\_027-048.pdf](http://epa.oszk.hu/00300/00315/00107/pdf/EPA00315_kozgazdasz_2013_06_027-048.pdf)

#### Refereed journal articles (in Hungarian):

3. Csordás Tamás & Nyirő Nóra (2012): Az információterjedés szerepe az innováció-elfogadásban: az okostelefonok és az online kollektív intelligencia, *Vezetéstudomány* 43(1) 64-73.
4. Csordás Tamás (2010): A tartalomipar az új média fényében, *Marketing & Menedzsment*, 44(1), 30-37.

#### Other journal articles (in English):

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