2

UNDERSTANDING BRAND USERS

> " When brands get on the Internet, they don't really seem to get the game. They don't understand that this is about interacting with us. They're like that fat, balding guy at a party who talks too loud, drinks too much, stares at the girls, and generally thinks the world revolves around him.
>
> (McCracken 2010, p. 90) "

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

When you finish reading this chapter, you will be able to answer these questions:

1. Why are brand choices reflective of user identity goals?

2. How has our understanding of the user–brand relationship changed over time?

3. What types of value do brands provide users?

4. How do business-to-business users (B2B) differ from business-to-consumer users (B2C)?

5. Why is authenticity important for users and how does this give rise to three key strategies for brand managers?

USERS CO-CREATE BRAND MEANING

Look at the people around you—how many brands can you see? Despite the claims of marketers, within different product and service categories, many brands largely deliver the same **functional benefits**. Yet, the people you observed probably all use many different brands, just as you yourself do. For them, and for you, these brands do mean something, and they communicate important things about you to others (and yourself). Regardless of functional convergence, you would undoubtedly argue for some time that your brand is better than others—just try suggesting your friend's favorite mass-market beer or cola is inferior to your own!

What we buy says a lot about who we are, how we see ourselves, and even who we would like to be. That is, brand choices are primarily about identity, rather than objective performance benefits. In saying that users shape brand meaning, we need to understand what they seek from brands. This chapter draws on the significant body of research that identifies how users support brands that are reflective of their desire for authenticity. That is, in upper-middle and high income (and even lower-middle income) economies, where materialism is the name of the game, brand choices reflect users' real or imagined identity (or identities) (Shankar and Fitchett 2002).

This view may seem controversial. Are all brand purchases really driven by identity? It is important to remember that many of our decisions are subconscious and often driven by cultural structures or norms that limit agency or free will. So, even claims that one is being "practical," "rational," or "savvy" are identity claims, and often governed by societal norms (as well as brand marketing campaigns) that place a premium on such criteria (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Beverland and Farrelly 2010). This logic can also be extended to business-to-business (B2B) buyers, who, despite the best efforts of organizations to subject their decisions to rational criteria, are as prone to emotion, satisficing, and identity motives as consumers. At the end of the chapter we will cover B2B buyers in more detail, identifying where and how they differ from business-to-consumer (B2C) in their brand choices.

Since brand choice represents an extension of our **real or imagined self (or selves)**, brands are often judged on their degree of genuineness or sincerity, key drivers of **authenticity**. A number of authors have argued for some time now that authenticity is the hallmark of postmodern marketing, and go so far as to propose that with co-creation, the value of the brand is determined by its perceived authenticity (Ind and Schmidt 2019). Authenticity involves both individual and social considerations, and takes three forms (consistency, conformity, and connection), all of which will prove useful for understanding how to co-create brand meaning over time. Chapter 3 will cover authenticity and brand equity in more detail, but in this chapter, the nature of marketplace authenticity will be explored in depth.

The chapter begins with an overview of different ways in which users have been viewed within eight different brand models; primarily moving from being viewed as passive receivers of brand messages to active co-creators of brand meaning. Although each model has its limitations, we will identify key principles and tools in each that help us co-create meaningful brands. The chapter then explores why as users we primarily use brands to achieve a state of **self-authentication** either through being oneself or fitting in. We then explore this motive in relation to business to business (B2B) users. As always, case examples will be provided throughout and the chapter concludes with a discussion of identity tension between Kat von D, her fans, and her investors.

CHANGES IN OUR UNDERSTANDING OF USERS AND BRANDS

Chapter 1 identified different disciplines that have impacted on our understanding of branding over the past 100 years or so. Although our understanding of brand-meaning management has advanced substantially over the past three decades, it is important to recognize studies of branding continue to offer new insights into value co-creation through brands (i.e., there is much we still do not know).

Early approaches to branding largely focused on the denotative role of brands. For example, Lux Soap originally did not connote a set of values; rather it simply denoted that Lux was in the category of "soap." During the early part of the twentieth century, as goods became more abundant, consumers primarily desired reliability and quality, especially since consumer trade-protection laws were in their infancy. Brands in essence therefore represented trust marks (Colman's English Mustard could be trusted) or objective guarantees of authenticity (vs. a counterfeit version), much as they had in early history (Chapter 1).

Throughout this period, advertisers played a critical role in building brand meaning, often searching for a unique selling point (USP) in the product, its performance, and/or its backstory to use in commercials. This began to change as large advertising agencies (in the UK and USA) such as JWT and Ogilvy & Mather drew on new knowledge emerging from economics and psychology to help understand consumer choice and loyalty. Economics identified the efficiency benefits of branding, while psychology explored how and why consumers made choices.

This research identified that brands help consumers minimize the cognitive effort involved in consumption. Since consumers face literally hundreds of consumption choices every day, they are simply unable to process information regarding alternatives, and/or assess competing claims between brands. Brands provide simple heuristics or "rules of thumb" to enable us to make sense of a complex world (Holt 2003). For much of the twentieth century, this view underpinned much of brand-management theory and practice, leading to an emphasis on consistency, simple performance benefits, and strong logo design.

In brand management, psychology still dominates much of the research and frames how many models, particularly the dominant customer-based brand equity (CBBE) approach, view the consumer. The CBBE model, developed by Kevin Keller (see "The Consumer Approach" below), treats the consumer as an information processor. In the simplest of terms, brands resonate more strongly if we know something about them and if that information is viewed positively (see Chapters 3 and 4 for more details).

In CBBE, the brand manager's job is to provide small bite-sized chunks of information about the brand (often in the form of a tagline), its benefits, and other associations to its target users, and to reinforce these over time. This information can be provided in a variety of ways (including directly through advertising and indirectly through packaging, sponsorship, and so on) and across a range of different on- and offline mediums. Although the CBBE model is consumer-focused in name, in reality the brand manager still controls the communicated meaning.

This view of the user as an information processor began to be challenged in the 1980s. Responding to calls for a richer understanding of consumption, the Marketing Science Institute

sponsored a group of researchers (Russell Belk, Melanie Wallendorf, and John Sherry Jr) to travel around the United States of America on a "consumer odyssey." Published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* in 1989, "The Sacred and Profane in Consumer Behaviour: Theodicy on the Odyssey," this seminal article identified that consumers were active co-creators of meaning, chose objects as extensions of the real or imagined self (or '**the extended self**; see (Belk 1988; 2013)), and often attributed very different meanings to brands than those intended by marketers. This extension of the self means that consumption choices are reflective of "we buy what we are" and gave rise to an interest in authenticity.

The "Consumer Odyssey" research program provided the impetus for an explosion in research focused on the lived experience of consumers, and critically viewed consumers as actively using brands to shape their identity. As a result, this work placed the consumer and their identity goals at the heart of branding. In contrast to psychological research, this work, informed by anthropology and sociology as well as a relational turn in marketing practice (see the Relational Model below), saw the consumer as an active meaning creator, with brands representing key identity resources, enabling one to be oneself and/or fit in through signaling allegiance to a role, group, or larger community, and its values. In contrast to psychological branding theories, cultural approaches view the consumer as an individual and social being, bounded in their choices by often subconscious socially defined structures, and motivated by **signaling value** and **linking value** or the ability of brands to communicate who we are and/or connect us to like-minded others (Cova 1997).

In the business-to-business realm, researchers challenged the notion that B2B marketing simply involved an extension of consumer-goods marketing, finding that purchase decisions ranged from simple to complex, involved multiple inputs, considerations of identity, and occurred within relationships and networks (Ford et al. 2002). Although an appreciation for branding in the B2B arena was slower to take off than B2C, B2B ideas did cross-over into consumer marketing, influencing our understanding of loyalty, relationships, communities, stakeholders, internal organizational dynamics, and even identity related motives behind choice. Critically, any change within the network or set of relationships the buyer operated in, could have a profound effect on their brand relationships (Beverland et al. 2007).

Consumer research also began to identify the communal nature of branding. Beginning with the revitalization of American motorcycle icon Harley Davidson in the 1990s, researchers identified the importance of **subcultures of consumption** to brand loyalty and identity. Where subcultures existed prior to brands, some managers were encouraged to build deliberate **brand communities** in order to strengthen bonds between members and the brand, often by encouraging stronger consumer-to-consumer (C2C) relationships. Finally, subcultures and communities could consist of multiple smaller groups, often called **tribes**, with the interaction between each presenting unique challenges for brand managers (Cova et al. 2007).

With interest in co-creation growing, marketing's dominant logic was challenged. In 2004, Stephen Vargo and Robert Lusch published "The Service-Dominant Logic of Marketing" (SDL) where they argued that users brought things (including brands) for the services they provided (value-in-use). In this framework, brands represent offers to users and only become seen as resources if they address important needs (including identity goals). One practical expression of this is Christensen

and colleagues' "Jobs to be Done" (see Further Reading) where brand marketers should focus on understanding what users are trying to achieve in different aspects of their lives and create value propositions focused on solving them.

A year later (2005) Eric Arnould and Craig Thompson formalized the Odyssey-inspired research into Consumer Culture Theory (CCT). Consistent with SDL, brands are valuable as identity resources for users and the communities they wish to be part of (including marketplace cultures and other communal markers such as class, gender, ethnicity). The CCT view sees consumers as struggling to define their true self in a context where traditional markers of identity have declined, where they face multiple, often conflicting goals, and where brands or branded contexts are ubiquitous. This view gave rise to several new approaches to understanding brand-meaning co-creation including the relational, communal, and cultural views covered below, and also highlighted that authenticity becomes the standard upon which brands are judged.

More recently, attention has been given to the way user value preferences are shifting away from ownership to access. New app-enabled platforms such as Airbnb, Lyft, and Lime have built global brands on an access-based model that provides services to users when and where they desire it, for as long as they need it. Fleura Bardhi and Giana Eckhardt (2017) have used the term "**liquid consumption**" to capture this access-based approach, to identify the ephemeral nature of this form of consumer value. Under this approach, brands can build value by offering users experiences rather than things and providing access to services (including those provided by goods) on an as-needs basis. This approach has interesting implications for a range of categories. Mindfulness providers for example may offer stressed out workers the ability to slow down and recharge before returning to their hectic lives. Solid brands may become part of a new category of luxury, since only users able to afford the storage space can own them.

Table 2.1 compares solid and liquid forms of consumption. Solid consumption is in essence materialism, or an emphasis on acquiring and having lots of stuff. In contrast, liquid consumption is dematerial, whereby users find no value in stuff per se, but focus on value in use, or what the stuff can do, when and where it is needed. Liquid consumption is therefore more dynamic, in that different contexts give rise to different jobs to be done (or needs), leading users to seek out solutions in the form of a new generation of platform-based brands such as Airbnb, Lyft, Spotify, and so on. Users of course engage in both solid and liquid consumption to varying degrees and intensities—the 2020 Covid-19 outbreak heightened demand for solid brands such as supermarkets and Amazon and Discogs and liquid services such as Netflix, Disney+, while devastating others such as Airbnb, restaurants, airlines, and retailers (although some solid brands such as Aldi innovated by partnering with the liquid Deliveroo to enter into online delivery for the first time). While loyalty to solid brands is potentially more enduring, for liquid brands, it can be fleeting (frequent travelers for example may have a phone [solid and enabling of access] full of apps for country-specific access services [liquid] which they may value highly when needed). Liquidity and solidity therefore co-exist, with users seeking valuable liquid experiences while also curating a set of objects that represent a different side to who they are (which is why the revival of analog technologies such as vinyl records occurs alongside the growth of Spotify). An extension of this framework into luxury markets by Eckhardt and Bardhi (2020) is provided in the further reading list the end of the chapter.

TABLE 2.1   Liquid vs. solid consumption

	Solid	**Liquid**
Definition	Extent to which consumption is enduring, ownership based, and material.	Extent to which consumption is ephemeral, access based, and dematerialized.
At the product level		
Consumer value	Value in size, weight, fixity, security, attachment, and commitment.	Value resides in being flexible, adaptable, fluid, mobile, light, detached, and fast.
Nature of attachment	Long-standing possession attachment/loyalty; stronger attachment to identity-related objects.	Fluid possession attachment/lack of loyalty; attachment to fewer objects; however, may be higher to particular products if they provide access.
Benefits	Identity and linking assume greater importance.	Use value assumes greater importance.
Level of possession	Emphasis on ownership and possession of material objects; more possessions are better.	Emphasis on access and intangible objects; fewer possessions are better.
Meaning	Consumption meaning is stable across contexts.	Consumption meaning varies by context.
At the consumption practices level		
Consumer value	Centrality of ownership and possession.	Centrality of access, sharing, and borrowing.
Stability	Practices are stable across contexts.	Practices vary by context.
Temporality	Enduring types of consumer involvement (e.g., loyalty, fanaticism, commitment) and relationships.	Ephemeral consumer involvement and relationships.
Benefits	Consumers value consumption for the identity and linking value it provides.	Consumers avoid emotional engagement and identification with the marketplace; however, this is not a form of consumer resistance or market alienation.
Nature of attachment	Emphasis on object attachment aspects of consumption (e.g., extending the self).	Emphasis on consumption practices, experiences, and networks.
Downsides	Burdensome	Instability and uncertainty

Source: Bardhi, Fleura and Giana M. Eckhardt , "Liquid Consumption", *Journal of Consumer Research*, 2017, 44 (3), 582–597, by permission of Oxford University Press

EIGHT APPROACHES TO BRAND-MEANING MANAGEMENT

Research on how and why users relate to brands has exploded over the past three decades. Each of these approaches has influenced how practitioners build brands, and although each has flaws, all have

something valuable to offer in different stages of the brand-building process (a summary of this is provided in Table 2.2). Different authors make assumptions about how and why users make choices, which generates different models of brand management. This text views brands as co-created by multiple authors (see Chapter 1, Figure 1.1), and therefore views the user as having an active role in brand-meaning development. That said, each of the eight models provides some value in our understanding of how brands should be managed. These are presented in Table 2.2.

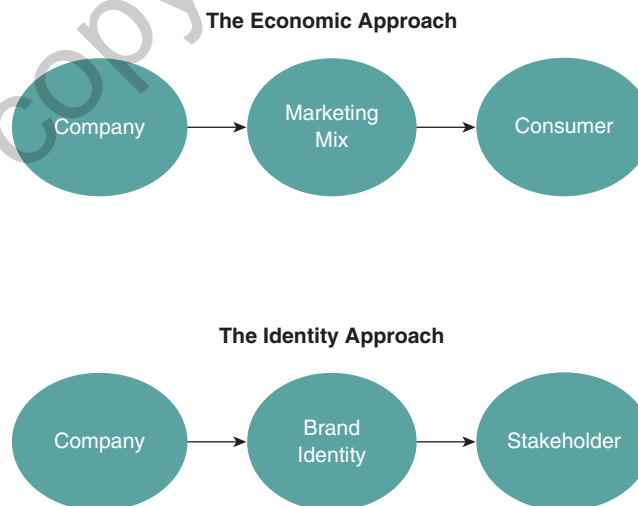TABLE 2.2 Important insights arising from the eight approaches to branding

Approach	Focus	Role of user	Important insight
Economic	Brands enhance market efficiencies.	Passive	The marketing mix must be calibrated to reinforce the brand.
Identity	Organizations can benefit by projecting an identity.	Passive	An organization/brand must present a consistent identity to the marketplace in everything it does.
Consumer-based	Building customer-based brand equity.	Source of need but passive	The brand is a function of what the user knows about it.
Personality	Enhancing the emotional connection of the brand through human-like traits.	Actively projecting	Users attribute person-like features/traits to brands and their users.
Relational	Understanding the role that brands play in the lives of users.	Active and messy	Users' interactions with brands shape their framing of these as a tool to achieve their life goals.
Experiential	Bringing the brand's identity to life through experiences.	Active and immersed	The brand's identity can be experienced via the senses (taste, sound, look, feel, smell).
Communal	Understanding how brands operate within a community setting.	Active and social	Brands must adhere to the norms of their respective communities to enhance their equity.
Cultural	Understanding how brands build value over time through cultural innovation.	Active and collective	When significant external changes occur in society, brands must radically innovate to maintain relevance.

For example, some models view the user as largely passive in relation to brand meaning. When we say they are "passive" we don't mean that no mental work is undertaken to understand what the brand means; rather we mean that models frame users as mere receivers of marketer-driven meanings. That means users are assumed to play no role in the meaning of the brand at all. Such approaches

lead to top-down models of brand-meaning creation whereby marketers provide all the content of the brand's intended meaning (reflected in Kat von D's reaction to fans' critique of her lifestyle in the case at the end of this chapter). In contrast, where the user is framed as an active meaning creator, the focus shifts to understanding user goals, their jobs to be done, and why the meaning they attribute to the brand may differ from that intended by marketers.
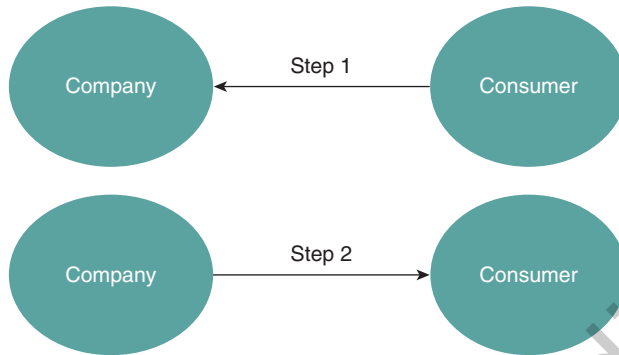
Heding et al. (2016) identify seven approaches to understanding brand relationships. Summaries of the logic of each school are presented in Figure 2.1. I add one further approach that is popular among practitioners and academic researchers—the experiential approach. Let's explore each approach in more detail.

1. The **economic approach** stems from product management and brand meaning as a spillover from investments in the marketing mix (the four Ps of promotion, place, product, and price). Brands in this approach make the market more efficient because they act as decision heuristics that help users make rational choices. Under this approach, users have short-term, transactional relationships with brands, and play no role in generating brand meaning. This approach represents a proto-approach to branding, although it still operates in some sectors such as automotive, some fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), agriculture, and business-to-business. The primary insight that remains relevant from this approach involves the need for brand identity to drive marketing mix activities. Ryanair let their positioning around value and timeliness drive everything they do, from their choice of airports (cheaper, out of the way secondary airports), use of fees for extras, lack of airline lounges, and low-quality advertising, to public relations "shock" stories about paying for the use of the toilet in air or stand-up seating that regularly appear in the tabloid newspapers read by their target market.
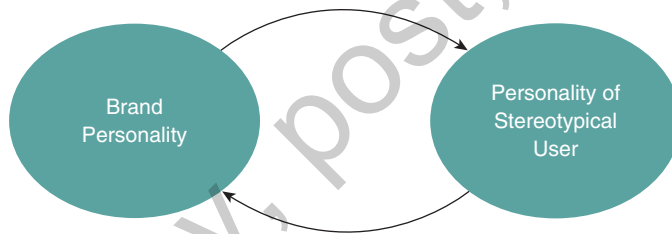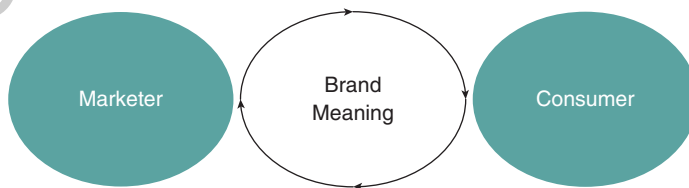
The Economic Approach

Company → Marketing Mix → Consumer

The Identity Approach

Company → Brand Identity → Stakeholder

The Consumer-based Approach

| Company | ← Step 1 | Consumer |

| Company | Step 2 → | Consumer |

The Personality Approach

| Brand Personality | ⇄ | Personality of Stereotypical User |

The Relationship Approach

| Marketer | Brand Meaning | Consumer |

(Continued)

FIGURE 2.1   (Continued)

The Experiential Approach

Source: Author's notes

The Community Approach

The Cultural Approach
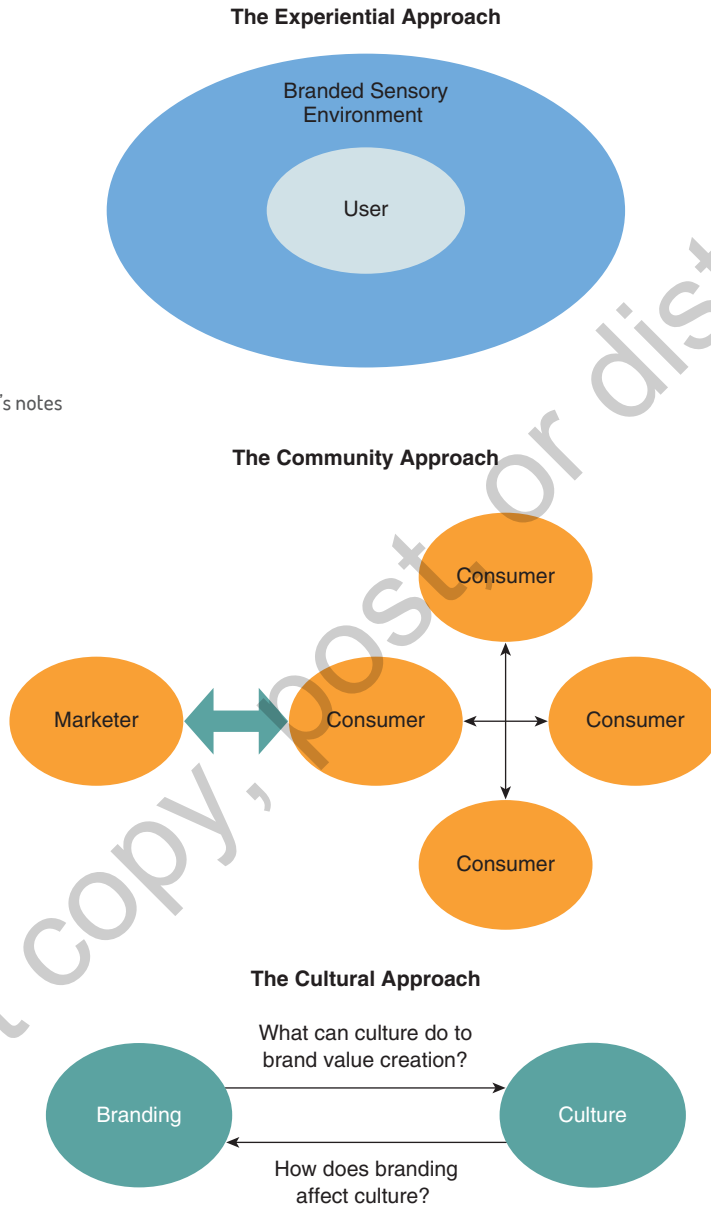
FIGURE 2.1   Approaches to branding and consumers

Source: Copyright © 2016. From *Brand Management: Research, Theory and Practice* by Heding, Tilde, Charlotte F. Knudtzen, and Mogens Bjerre. Reproduced by permission of Taylor and Francis Group, LLC, a division of Informa plc.

2. The **identity approach** was explicated in Wolf Olins's foundational (1978) book *The Corporate Personality*, which focused on ensuring organizations represent themselves consistently in the marketplace. The approach originally had little to say about the user (as it was more focused on organizational identity-systems), although recent interest in corporate branding (covered in Chapter 6) suggests the user is active in meaning creation. This approach plays a large role in the service and professional sectors today and critically highlights the importance of the customer journey and "moments of truth." Critically, firms undertake brand audits to ensure that customers' holistic experience of the firm consistently conforms to the organization's brand vision (see Chapter 6). The identity approach retains much currency within the corporate branding sector and has led to an interest in employee branding as well as an emphasis on ensuring alignment between intended identity, organizational culture, and user experience. When Virgin started an airline in Australia, they experienced a lot of criticism for asking potential employees to dance, sing, or act spontaneously in interviews. However, the purpose here was to ensure staff would be able to work together and solve customer problems that might emerge due to the unexpected delays that are common in the sector.

3. The **consumer-based approach** is synonymous with the customer-based brand equity (CBBE) model of Kevin Keller (1993; 2003). This approach argues that the brand exists in the mind of the consumer and is based heavily in cognitive psychology and informational processing models of choice. In this model, the more one knows about the brand, the greater its strength (assuming the knowledge is positive). Although this approach emphasizes consumer perception, and thereby distinguishes between **intended brand identity** and **received brand image**, the marketer is still largely in control of shaping how the consumer views the brand. This approach remains the dominant one in brand management today, although it is not without its critics. The consumer approach can encompass the personality, relational, experiential, and communal approaches (these are all ways in which to build brand knowledge) (Keller 2020) and is particularly useful when it comes to brand extensions (which are critical to keeping brands fresh and achieving financial performance targets) and in reinforcing the brand day-to-day (assuming no substantive change in the wider sociocultural environment). We will expand on this approach throughout the text, starting with Chapters 3 and 4.

4. The **personality approach** draws on psychological personality archetypes and proposes that consumers ascribe certain human-like characteristics to brands and their users. Adopted in the 1950s to identify likely users for certain brands, this approach has had a large influence on the communication of brand associations. Jennifer Aaker developed a brand-personality scale in 1997 which has been widely adopted in practice. The name and number of personality archetypes are often driven by the school of psychology of the author, although the ultimate idea remains the same. This approach also drew on the notion of the **extended self**—or the idea that consumers see brands as extensions of their real and/or desired selves (Belk 1988, 2013). Importantly, the consumer in this view is seen as a more active meaning creator through the process of projection. And,

rather than being viewed as a rational decision maker, the personality approach high-lights the importance of emotions and identity in brand choice. In theory and practice, **brand personality** is highly influential (although equally controversial) and will be covered further in Chapter 5.
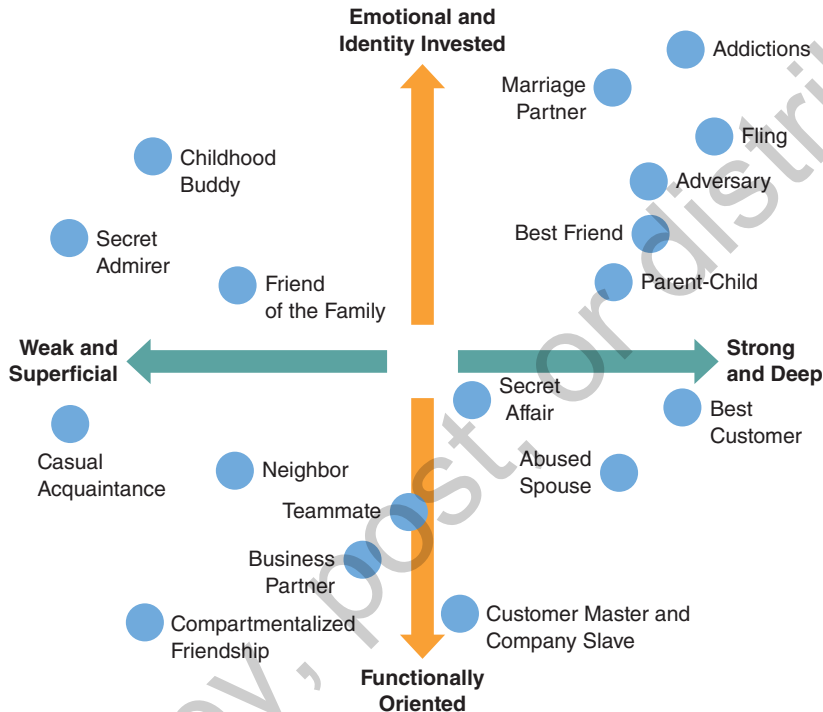

FIGURE 2.2   Consumer–brand relationship styles

5.   The **relational approach** to brand meaning emerged out of an increased interest in relationship marketing in the 1990s and was presented in an article by Susan Fournier in 1998. Fournier's "Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research" remains one of the most cited academic works on branding and focused on how users connect brands to their lives. This approach sees the consumer as an active meaning creator, characterizing brands according to common relationship styles (see Figure 2.2 for examples), and highlights that consumers can have intense relationships with seemingly mundane brands (such as toothpaste). In this model, the messy lives of users shape the meaning of the brand, with the relationship constantly shifting in line with their changing goals, world, and interactions with the brand. Should the consumer change their goals or experience a change in any of the various contexts they operate in (including their job, life stage, roles, social relationships), the brand relationship can

change, and there is often little marketers can do about it. An influential idea, in practice building strong consumer–brand relationships underpins models of financial brand equity (see Chapter 3).

6. The **experiential approach** has its roots in the pioneering work of Morris Holbrook and Elizabeth Hirschman (1982) who focused on the hedonistic and fantastical aspects of consumption. **Experiential marketing** became more popular with practitioners in the late 1990s after it was popularized by James Pine and Joseph Gilmore (1998; 1999) in their article and subsequent book *The Experience Economy*. The thesis was simple: as economies developed, value moved from buying goods and services to purchasing experiences. The approach views the user largely as a sensory being in that meaning is shaped and created through strategies that appeal to the five senses (sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste). In this approach, consumers are immersed in a branded world (such as Lush cosmetics), a brand museum (such as those built by Volkswagen and Ferrari), or a themed **servicescape** (such as M&M's World) or the environment where the service encounter takes place. This approach is used to literally "bring the brand to life" in a physical setting (such as a "pop up" store), online environment, or virtual reality platform. Brands such as Harley Davidson have even gone so far as to seek legal protection for the sound of their motorcycles (the courts are typically reluctant to grant such protection). The experiential approach is useful in rendering the brand authentic and highlights potential new sources of differentiation. Luxury brands have gone to great lengths to embody their identity in expensive flagship stores, all of which are aimed at immersing the consumer in the brand concept.

BRAND ASIDE 2.1: CUSTOMER–BRAND RELATIONSHIPS

Susan Fournier's 1998 article on consumer–brand relationships represented a major advance in understanding co-creation. Fournier undertook multiple interviews with three users to explore over 100 different brand relationships. She then quantified this as part of her PhD studies, to produce one of the most influential works in branding. The idea was simple—would users apply relational metaphors to brands? Her research identified they would, and the range of different expressions of this is presented in Figure 2.2. In examining how brands came to be framed a certain way, Fournier identified that what mattered was an understanding of the customer, their life theme (i.e., identity goal), and life world (or the wider lived in context in which the user sought to self-authenticate). She identified how the same brand could be framed in radically different ways, because of the different lived experiences and goals of users (an online video of this is an easy introduction to her ideas; Fournier 2012). She also identified that if either the life theme (broad aim in life) or life world (the context where one enacts their life theme) changes, the relationship can radically shift, and there was little brand managers could do in response.
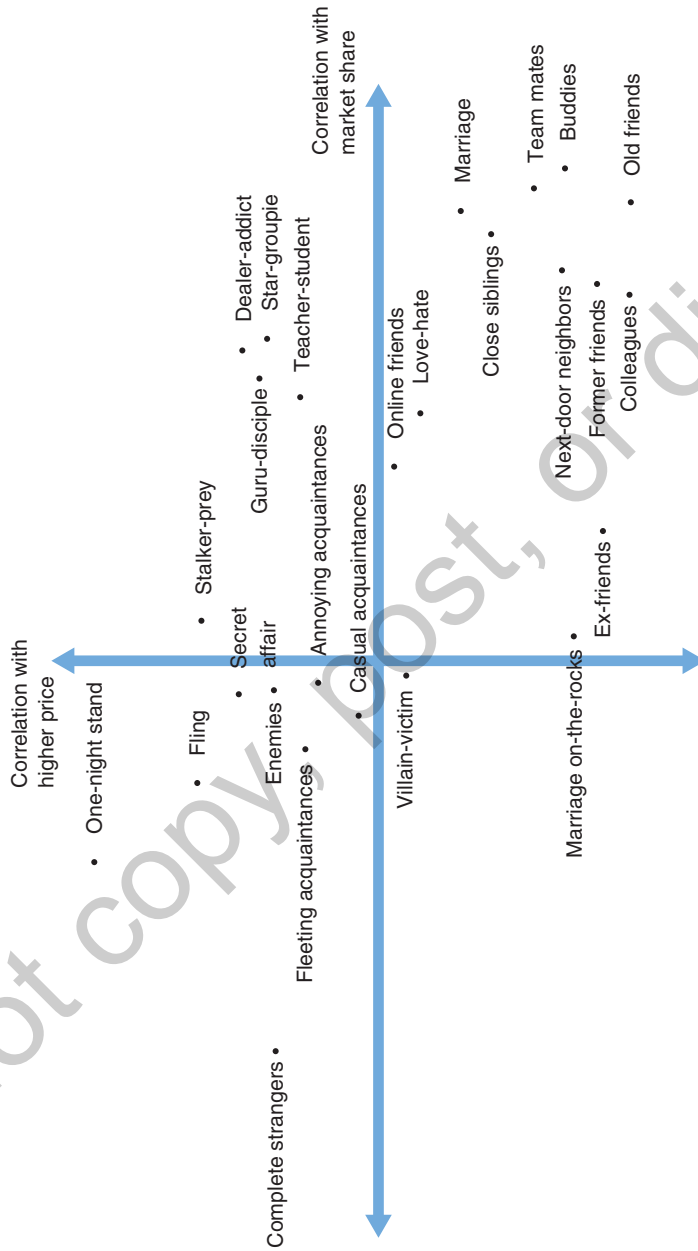
(Continued)

FIGURE 2.3   Relationship styles, price and share

Source: "Unlock the Mysteries of Your Customer Relationships" [product# R1407E] by Jill Avery, Susan Fournier, and John Wittenbraker, July–August 2014 edition of HBR. © 2014 Harvard Business School Publishing. Republished by permissions

Figure 2.3 identifies how these relationships are mapped according to market share and price. Subsequent work focused on the importance of capturing real-time information about user–brand relationships, and their trajectory. It was also critical to understand the unwritten rules of each relationship. Fournier and colleagues noted that relationships were governed by a set of "implied terms" which were formed and adjusted through user interactions with the brand. Co-created relationships could therefore lead to misunderstandings between brand owners and their users because the former had failed to take into account shifts in user expectations. To manage relationships, firms should listen for signals that suggested a certain metaphor, understand the underlying rules of the relationship, and help mitigate users to new relationship types by providing them with more reasons to use the brand. In regard to the last point, brands viewed as strangers needed to add emotional associations in order to tempt the user into a fling, which may then trigger a more lasting relationship. Does this apply to B2B? Yes and no. A recent study of B2B buyers identified that relational metaphors were used, but were less emotionally intense than those in B2C (Blocker et al. 2012).

7. The **community approach** was proposed by John Schouten and James McAlexander in their study on the rebirth of Harley Davidson published in 1995. This approach highlights the communal aspects of brand relationships, giving rise to an interest in **brand community**, **subcultures of consumption**, **consumer tribes**, and, recently, **brand publics** (all of which will be covered in Chapter 9). In this model, the brand's meaning emerges through one-to-one and one-to-many relationships between consumers and the brand, but importantly, through consumers and other consumers of the brand. In this case, the brand's value may result solely from the linking value the community surrounding it provides to an individual consumer. Jeep owner days, for example, mix experienced drivers with novices in order to demonstrate vehicle features and enhance driver confidence. This community creates stronger bonds between drivers, and between drivers and their vehicles, and therefore ensures greater brand loyalty, positive word of mouth, and increased likelihood to repurchase a Jeep in the future. In this sense the brand is truly co-created through peer-to-peer relationships (P2P). This model is used to varying degrees by marketers, especially following the shift to web-based interactivity or Web 2.0, but does require brand managers to tread carefully as they must conform to shared norms of the community.

8. The **cultural approach** is the most recent approach to brand building. This approach focuses upon the sociocultural context in which consumers operate and the role that brands can play in enabling them to find their place among a wider collective (such as the nation state, or as a member of a category including gender, class, race, and so on). In this approach, emphasis is given to the brand's cultural myths, and how these address societal schisms that lead groups of users to question who they are. For example, Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty drew on feminist ideas and parents' concerns that the influence of idealized body images in the media could harm their daughters. The consumer is an active meaning maker, albeit one operating within (often) subconscious structures (gender, class, race, etc.) that limit choice (Bourdieu 1984). Unlike identity and consumer

models, the cultural approach places a premium on relevance, identifying the importance of changing the brand to suit the times (through "cultural innovation," see Chapter 8).

Throughout this book, we will draw on each of these approaches where relevant to explore different aspects of brand meaning co-creation.

BRAND ASIDE 2.2: CUSTOMERS' "JOBS TO BE DONE"

A shift to value-in-use has put the emphasis squarely on satisfying user goals as the key aim for brand managers (and marketers more generally). There are many ways researchers and practitioners have approached this question. Brand Aside 2.1 identifies the issues of life world and life themes as drivers of user–brand relationships. Self-authentication is another goal-driven approach. Subsequent chapters will stress the need for empathy (see Chapters 8, 9, and 11), which simply means viewing things from the perspective of the user. One recent, and increasingly popular, way of thinking about value-in-use was coined by innovation scholar, the late Clayton Christensen (with his colleagues)—"customers' 'jobs to be done'" (JTBD). This simply refers to understanding what customers are trying to accomplish and the circumstances or context in which the goal arises. (Brand Aside 2.4 on Nintendo Wii provides one example.) These can include big goals, or everyday, messy, minor jobs that can generate a lot of stress and frustration.

Christensen and colleagues (2016) identify a number of attributes of JTBD. First, job is just shorthand for user goal. Second, the content or circumstance is often the most critical factor to address. Third, solutions address poorly solved or unsolved problems. Fourth, jobs do not simply refer to functional needs, they often reflect critical identity motives including the need to be oneself and also fit in (covered in self-authentication below). So what should brand managers do? First, reflect on your own circumstances—are there jobs you have to get done for which there is currently no solution? Second, look for user workarounds. These refer to the ways in which users adapt existing offerings to their needs and can often be addressed through removing obstacles that other brands place in the way of users. Third, look for tasks people want to avoid. Addressing these can remove a significant amount of dissatisfaction from users' lives. Fourth, look for unexpected uses of your brand that have been created by users. These could represent potential areas for brand innovation, either through extension or more radical actions (see Chapters 7 and 8).

Understanding this can provide opportunities for brand managers. Drawing on Fournier's relationship classification, brands classed as abusive partners are ones that are often doing a poor job of meeting customers' everyday needs, but survive because few if any alternatives exist. These brands often scored high on behavioral loyalty but poor on net promoter scores (see Chapter 4) or attitudinal loyalty (i.e., we use it a lot but hate doing so), signaling that the user is looking for an alternative. Identifying such situations, and there are many, is often what sits behind the strategies of strong brands such as Dyson, who focus on improving the operation of everyday household appliances (and industrial ones such as hand-dryers). JTBD applies to all users, B2B and B2C, and involves many of the tools identified in Chapters 4 and 6.

THE VALUE OF BRANDS TO USERS

Value is central to all marketing-related activities. Over time, our understanding of value has shifted. Originally marketers focused on value-as-exchange whereby users would decide if the brand's benefits were more valuable to them than the price asked (or the money they would have to exchange for it). Co-creation is based on the service-dominant logic view of marketing, which emphasizes **value-in-use**. This type of value is user-centered, placing emphasis on how the brand will help users achieve their goals (or customers' jobs to be done"—see Brand Aside 2.2). One of those goals concerns identity (Merz et al. 2009). Holt (2004a, p. 11) defines identity value as:

> The aspect of a brand's value that derives from the brand's contributions to self-expression.

This type of **symbolic value** involves using brands as a signal. This signal can be about the self, or it can be about membership of a group. Thus brands are a mark of distinction. Luxury brands for example may signal success, economic wealth, and/or taste, while brands with strong green credentials may signal your commitment to the environment. Brands can signal social distinction. In the case of groups, a brand may signal similarity or a shared outlook between individuals who have no actual connection to one another (in this sense the community is "imagined"). This is called **linking value**, which is defined as:

> The brand's contribution to establishing and/or reinforcing bonds between individuals. The greater the contribution of a brand to the development and strengthening of bonds, the greater its linking value will be. (Cova and Cova 2002, p. 603)

Since brands can signal symbolic membership, potential users may view them as resources to connect with seemingly like-minded others. One way of thinking about this is to think about a favorite commercial place or space. Such places can be virtual (e.g., Instagram) or physical (e.g., Games Workshop) but for you they represent something that sociologists call "a third place," which is the place after work and home that you spend significant time in. These places are typically where connections with others occur, whether they are actual connections between friends or imagined connections between like-minded people.

Brands that enable us to imagine connections with like-minded others have strong linking value. Linking value is one of the reasons Apple (one of the most valuable global brands) continues to provide stickers with its products—they enable users to signal they are part of what is commonly called the creative class or derisively identified as urban hipsters. Brands can also signal membership of a national community, helping the user fit in to a sense of place. However, this can sometimes have unintended consequences. The example of Fred Perry covered in Brand Aside 2.3 describes this and highlights the challenges that co-creation can present when brands gain meaning that their managers consider undesirable.

WHAT ABOUT B2B USERS?

For many years, **B2B brands** were seen as a contradiction in terms. Why? Business buyers were always thought to be rational, focused on getting the best deal or price, and therefore not susceptible

to brand-driven claims. At best, a proven track record of delivery and performance was enough. As a result, many B2B organizations paradoxically traded on their reputation but rejected the need for branding (Beverland 2005c).

This has changed in the last two decades. As B2B markets have changed and become more competitive, supply chains have become more transparent, business services have become more dominant in the sector (with the decline in manufacturing), and branding as a means of creating value has become more popular (Graham and Mudambi 2016; Gregory and McNaughton 2004). Since many purchasing decisions involve inputs into the buying firm's competitive future, B2B brands are also assessed on their ability to get the job done over the long-term. B2B buyers often seek firms like a "best friend" (see Figure 2.3) will provide honest advice and be genuinely interested in their success. Business buyers may look for brands with track records of process and product or service innovations as they'll require upgrades (computer software for example), efficiency savings (improved fuel efficiency for jet engines), and breakthrough ideas (new cultural marketing campaigns from advertising agencies) throughout the life of the relationship to ensure sustained leadership (Beverland et al. 2007).

Unsurprisingly, those buyers were not always as rational as we were led to believe. One characteristic of B2B markets is that long-term relationships between firms are normal. As Graham and Mudambi state: "Although B2B branding is anchored in an exchange relationship, the buyers and sellers often have close personal ties and common interests" (2016, p. 272). There are many reasons for this. B2B firms often exist within complex networks where each party is, to some degree, reliant on the other. Relationships are necessary because of the complexity of the product involved and the need for coordination. Relationships provide buyers with a sense of certainty that if something goes wrong, they can always call on someone they know and trust to help fix problems. **Linking value** is therefore critical for B2B brands.

Identity value is also important. B2B buyers are influenced by a range of environmental, organizational, interpersonal, and individual factors, all of which make for complicated purchase decisions and often involve balancing competing external and internal interests or tensions rather than focusing on the best offer in terms of price or functional performance. Therefore B2B users may select brands that reinforce their professional standing as a risk taker, or risk reducer, or creative solutions provider, or master of efficiency. In so doing they may also signal they are committed to the organization's goals and values, which provides a form of linking back to a larger collective. In the discussion of authenticity, we will see that business users are just as keen to stand out as they are to fit in.

BRAND ASIDE 2.3: FRED PERRY AND THE FAR RIGHT

While brands work hard to build desirable associations, co-creation recognizes that subcultures may also co-opt brands for their own ends. Such associations can affect brand image (Toyota for example has often been associated with terrorism since their rugged and reliable pickup trucks are often the vehicle of choice for high-profile groups such as Isis), and put brand managers in a difficult position. The brand was founded in 1952 by the British tennis great Fred Perry (named as one of the

greatest tennis players of all time and also noted for his sportsmanship), and sought to leverage the glamor of the sport, and the ethos and lifestyle (he was linked to numerous Hollywood celebrities and had a romantic relationship with screen legend Marlene Dietrich) of the founder. The brand's most famous product is the iconic Fred Perry tennis shirt (a polo shirt), adorned by a laurel wreath. The shirt became popular in the 1960s with Mod culture, Punks in the 1970s, and sponsored British champion Andy Murray until 2009.

Recently, however, the brand has taken on a different image, when a black and yellow striped Fred Perry polo shirt was adopted by American alt-right group The Proud Boys in 2014. This group has instigated many marches in the United States, mixing claims of free speech with racist sentiment, such as the chant "Jews will not replace us" during the violent protests in Charlottesville Virginia in 2017 (that resulted in the death of anti-racism activist Heather Heyer). This co-optation of the brand led several brand ambassadors to end their relationship with the brand, while others, such as Irvine Welsh, pointed out that skinhead culture was incredibly diverse and had its roots among UK Jamaican immigrants in the 1960s, before fragmenting into a wide range of groups, anti-racist and racist. Although Fred Perry is not the first brand to be co-opted in this way, the co-optation was felt strongly at the brand whose founder was the son of a socialist MP and Eastern European Jewish businessman. The brand's approach was to stress its values of individuality and conformity, while noting that its heritage spoke for itself (Davidson 2020).

How do brands react to co-optation of this type? British brand Lonsdale turned the tables on the German far right, refusing to sell the brand in stores associated with the far right and running a campaign under the tagline "Lonsdale loves all colours," attracting anti-racist supporters to adopt the brand as their own (Idris 2019). Others, such as Toyota, wince every time a new terrorist group appears on the nightly news in one of their trucks, dusting off well-worn public relations strategies to deny the link. Co-optation of course can also work in the brand's favor, with brands such as Australia's iconic Dunlop Volley shoe being reinvigorated by teenage clubbing subculture in the early 2000s (Beverland and Ewing 2005). We will return to how one leverages these unexpected associations in Chapter 9.

CO-CREATION AND THE CENTRALITY OF AUTHENTICITY

In this text, authenticity is essential to co-creation and, as we will see in Chapter 3, brand equity. It is perhaps ironic that in markets characterized by manufactured images and identities that authenticity, or the *pursuit* of the real, true, and genuine, has become the gold standard of modern branding. Sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991, p. 9) identifies that authenticity is the preeminent framework for self-actualization, retro-branding expert Stephen Brown (2003) has identified that authenticity is central to postmodern marketing, while consumer researchers identify that the desire for authenticity shapes consumer expectations about brands and related experiences (Beverland and Farrelly 2010). Authenticity seemingly presents several problems to the managers of brands since commerce was viewed as artificial or motivated by base or self-interested concerns, and therefore the opposite of

what was historically deemed authentic. Many of these problems concern how to build brands or enhance relevance through co-creation and therefore will be addressed in each of the following chapters. However, marketing experts Gilmore and Pine (2007) suggest the secret to rendering authenticity through branding lies in understanding the following paradox:

1.   Everything humans create is essentially fake or inauthentic (because it would not occur naturally).

2.   Everything humans create can be perceived as real or authentic by users (if it conforms to user expectations of the real).

This paradox arises out of a complex philosophical debate between what is really real and what is experienced as real. In essence, this means that although claims of authenticity can always be contested, brand managers can render authenticity through carefully constructed strategies. A review of research on marketplace authenticity identifies that authenticity is always performed, via the careful deployment of brand cues (such as references to the past, or moral claims) (Cankurtaran and Beverland 2020a). For authenticity to occur, users must feel able to suspend disbelief (i.e., that they know it's a marketing claim) or negotiate a number of paradoxes in order to play along with the brand's narrative (Grayson and Martinec 2004; Rose and Wood 2005). Why might they do so?

REAL OR FAKE? USERS PREFER THE SEEMINGLY REAL

A common objection to marketers claims of authenticity is that they are not truly "real." However, does this matter? What is the opposite of the real? Automatically we think of that which is "fake." However, the line between real and fake is blurred. Although we used to think of authenticity as something objective, or inherent in the object, researchers now agree it is co-created and defined by social consensus. Consumers often find the seemingly real more useful and valuable than the actual real and actively play along if the performance is engaging, such as in their engagement with highly scripted "reality television" (Rose and Wood 2005). In essence, consumers often see what they want to see when it comes to claims of authenticity.

In his book *The Authenticity Hoax*, social philosopher and journalist Andrew Potter (2011) discusses the issue of truth and truthiness in relation to claims of authenticity. Before the emergence of "post-truth" politics, "alternative facts" and "fake news," truthiness was a term used by American satirist Stephen Colbert in relation to "gut feel" claims by politicians:

Truthiness refers to the quality of preferring concepts or facts one wishes or believes to be true, rather than concepts or facts known to be true. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truthiness)

Consumer researchers use a similar concept called **motivated reasoning** to describe the same process whereby consumers are motivated to see only what they want to see or what confirms their personal preferences. At the same time, consumers ignore or rationalize away information that disconfirms their worldview. Marketers can also do this, which often undermines co-creation as it leads them

to prefer "on-brand" insights generated from loyalists rather than from non-target users that may provide new sources of meaning and growth for the brand. This leads consumers to construct a personal "echo chamber" (made all the more powerful by social media) that reinforces their personal preferences rather than challenges them. This phenomenon often explains why Twitter users (who are overwhelmingly liberal in their political views) express "shock" or "surprise" at unexpected political results, such as the United Kingdom's vote to leave the European Union in 2016 or Donald Trump's election as president of the USA.

Therefore, authenticity is not so much real, as seemingly real. For example, in a study of tourist sites, Kent Grayson and Radan Martinec (2004) found that consumers preferred the iconically authentic (what we think the "real" should look like) rather than the indexically authentic (the historically real). In their case, consumers thought the house of fictional detective Sherlock Holmes more real than the actual birthplace of William Shakespeare. For visitors, the mass popularity of the Holmes stories meant consumers had a clear picture in their mind of what the detective's house should look like. Put simply, it felt right, something Gilmore and Pine's authenticity paradox (mentioned above) reminds us of.

Studies of product brands find similar outcomes. A study on craft beer identified how consumers understood that all claims of authenticity were marketing constructions but nonetheless they valued those brands that conformed to their expectations of what an authentic craft-beer brand should be (brewed in a small, independent brewery, by those with a true passion for the craft, respect for tradition, and not motivated by commercial gain). In this study, consumers often attributed authenticity to brands from large breweries that "looked the part" as opposed to those that genuinely had connections to place, tradition, and social programs (Beverland et al. 2008).

For marketers, this opens up many possibilities to create value, although as you will see, brand managers must tread very carefully as the line between real and fake is very fine and often only discovered when crossed.

BEING ONESELF VS. FITTING IN: WHY USERS SEEK AUTHENTIC BRANDS

In examining identity goals and consumption, Arnould and Price (2000) identify that globalization (the collapse of national borders and greater connectivity in trade and communication), deterritorialization (the weakening of ties between culture and place such as the use of Japanese symbols by UK-based brand Superdry), and hyperreality (difficulties in telling real from fake) have undermined traditional sources of identity. However, rather than reject authenticity, consumers have turned to the marketplace and used brands and consumption rituals as resources to achieve the true self or what they call **self-authentication**. However, consumers are never fully free from social obligations (Goffman 1957), and this means that achieving self-authentication in a sociocultural system requires balancing two practices:

1. **Authenticating acts**: These are individual actions that transcend social expectations. For simplicity's sake we label this "**being oneself**." As identified in Figure 2.4 these involve pursuits for their own sake (such as knowledge, art, personal enlightenment, and so on), spontaneity (or the sense of flow that comes from being in the moment), uniqueness, and

surprise. These are activities and pursuits that reflect the real or imagined self rather than conforming to the expectations of others. Paradoxically, to be oneself, one must also fit in with and conform to certain norms or rules.

2. **Authoritative performances**: These are cultural displays or performances that reinforce membership of a group. In essence they involve conforming to certain norms or expectations, and therefore to simplify we label this "**fitting in**." Fitting in can involve acting the part, and can involve conforming to role expectations (i.e., your job, socially defined roles such as motherhood or masculinity), fitting in with communal norms (including brand communities), and wider societal norms. As we shall see, brands must also do this. As identified in Figure 2.4 these involve scripted and rehearsed actions, engagement in rituals and traditions, and stylized displays. Authoritative performances involve impression management and represent boundaries or limits to authenticating acts. What does this mean? Think about how you might be yourself by expressing a desire to be creative—you must fit in with society's expectations of what creativity is, potentially earning little or eschewing financial success, dressing and acting a certain way, and yes, using certain brands. You may not want to do this, but you must act the part to achieve self-authentication. The same standards apply to brands who wish to signal their position—to be luxury for example, the brand must look the part, by adopting certain cues or brand codes (see Chapters 5, 6, and 8 for more detail).

One simple way of understanding this is through the "secretary's bag." In China, materialism currently defines status and success. For the primarily young women in secretarial roles, this means they are "forced" to purchase luxury brands such as Gucci and Louis Vuitton in order to demonstrate their success. This is an authoritative performance. Failure to do so means they do not fit in and are perceived as being unsuccessful, and are therefore passed over for promotion, making the achievement of any personal goals more difficult. Therefore, self-authentication for the secretary requires the purchase of an expensive luxury handbag in order to fit in with the collective expectation regarding success and performance. This, then, provides her with the resources to be herself in other aspects of her life.

This would of course seem ideal for luxury houses such as Louis Vuitton and Gucci. In societies that value "being oneself," luxury brands must perform a different authoritative performance—they must downplay logos and ostentation, play up their craft heritage, and pretend that they are hard to get. European high income countries are old luxury markets and offer little growth opportunities for these brands. However, in countries where conformity is prized, luxury brand expert Jean-Noel Kapferer (2012) states that consumers stand out by fitting in. For luxury brands this is an enviable situation to be in as they can continue to sell more and more, without undermining the prestige of the brand. However, in China, mass luxury brands such as Louis Vuitton and Gucci have discovered there are limits to this. Why? Their brands are now viewed as too common, literally "secretaries' bags." Already this has resulted in a new round of authoritative performances through the selection of more expensive brands such as Hermès (Willett 2015).

In an ethnographic study of Australian surfing, Beverland and Farrelly (2011) identified that the interplay between authenticating acts and authoritative performances undermined established brands and provided opportunities for smaller, local craft brands. For consumers who desired to

become subcultural insiders (i.e., to achieve their desired goal of being a "true" surfer), among many other things, they needed to master the art and craft of surfing. This meant putting in many hours in the water, surfing on seemingly poor waves, falling off, getting dragged under, understanding the shared rituals or rules among surfers that govern who can ride a wave when beaches were busy, and being humble in terms of achievements.

To achieve this, wannabe surfers needed to transcend expectations of looking cool with the latest surfboard endorsed by a high-profile surfer and learn to surf on longer, heavier, slower boards. Using a "second-hand board" was seen as an essential rite of passage as it meant the wannabe surfer was prepared to sacrifice image and ego for the pursuit of expertise. Established brands such as Rip Curl had engaged in inauthentic brand extensions into fashion in order to meet the needs of stock-holders rather than the surf community. Many of their branded stores were staffed by non-surfers, undermining claims of authenticity and sincerity. As such, these brands declined as resources for "true surfers," ultimately losing their connection to the subculture.

In their place, smaller brands, made by local shapers (those who skillfully handcraft or "shape" a surfboard), emerged as more valuable tools because of their sole commitment to mastering the art of surfing and their dedication to making boards that were right for local conditions (similar to how winemakers emphasize the unique aspects of local conditions or *terroir* in their brand marketing). Failure to manage authenticating acts and authoritative performances has seen many global surf brands such as Quiksilver file for bankruptcy in 2015 while Rip Curl's and Billabong's brand equity (and share price) declined substantially.

Brand Aside 2.4 provides another example, and identifies how the Nintendo Wii design team exploited the desire to fit in to regenerate their brand and create new value in a so-called Red Ocean Market, or a market defined by intense competition and diminishing prospects for profits (Kim and Mauborgne 2015).

Authenticating Acts

Outcomes
Individuation
Differentiation
Flow
Peak experience
Peak performance

Orientations
Intrinsic valuing
Spontaneity
Uniqueness
Surprise

Struggle for Self and Community

Authoritative Performances

Outcomes
Integration
Membership
Security
Community

Orientations
Rehearsal
Scripting
Ritualization
Invoked tradition
Stylisation

FIGURE 2.4 Authenticating acts and authoritative performances

> ### BRAND ASIDE 2.4: HOW THE NINTENDO WII DESIGN TEAM ENABLED USERS TO BE THEMSELVES WHILE FITTING IN
>
> Why was Nintendo's Wii console so successful? Design expert Roberto Verganti (2009) argues that reconfiguring the idea of computer games from something played alone or with others connected virtually, to something played together with real people in the same physical space, enabled Nintendo to create a game changer (no pun intended). Nintendo's insights enabled them to sell simpler games with lower quality graphics to new sets of users (as well as long-time gamers).
>
> But this explanation only scratches the surface of the Wii's success. Postmodernity has given rise to many lifestyle changes including longer working hours, more sedentary lives, less time for loved ones, and products that blur the boundaries between real life and fantasy, often in the form of violent video games (Firat and Venkatesh 1995). In the middle of this are parents who are struggling with multiple roles including provider, protector, best friend to their children, and meeting societal expectations of "good parenting." The Wii solves all these problems in one go.
>
> The Wii was released in 2006, a time of heightened concerns about terrorism, distrust in leaders, perceptions of social decline, spiraling childhood obesity rates, concern over online sexual predators, and nostalgia for simpler times. Cocooning was one result, with the Wii's design enabling players of all ages, fitness, and skill levels to play together without leaving the comfort and safety of the house. In one stroke, parents could believe they were enabling their kids to have fun, engage in exercise, and engage in wholesome play. Together, these benefits and the perceived increased time they spent with their children meant the Wii enabled them to achieve the status of "good parent," a role that blends being oneself and fitting in.
>
> In this sense the value of a brand like the Wii lies in its ability to reduce the tensions between multiple identity goals.

BEING AUTHENTIC: THREE STRATEGIES FOR BRAND MANAGERS

How do brand managers act authentically? This is a question that has challenged many writers, and there are as many answers as there are studies. David Lehman and his colleagues (2019) did a large review of the meaning of authenticity in business and management research, and narrowed it down to three types:

1. Consistency: this is one of the most important principles of branding (see Chapter 6). Put simply it means that brands must walk the walk, and deliver on their espoused values. This leads to the practice of building brands from the inside out as firms must align their internal operations with any externally communicated brand promises. In this way users

are able to judge a brand's claims to be true and unique. This is particularly important when brands embrace a purpose (see Chapter 11).

2. Conformity: on the face of it, this goes against much branding advice and traditional beliefs about authenticity. However, brands must also fit in and engage in authoritative performances. Brands must also address what we call "points of parity" or general standards that all competitors in the category must meet minimum expectations (examples may include battery life and camera quality in mobile phones). More broadly, brands may have to conform to certain norms within communities or subcultures to be seen as legitimate. In communicating membership of a category, brands also draw on culturally defined codes. Think about how one would communicate "budget." The focus is not just on price, but on a number of codes that signal "no frills" (or no money is wasted on non-essential items), less service staff, simple web pages, add-on costs for extras, and in some cases, certain color and font choices. Conformity also is critical to communal branding, covered in Chapter 9.

3. Connection: this involves connecting to a certain time, place, or person. Whereas conformity involves fitting in, connection can involve standing out, as the brand is able to form a connection to a particular user or group of users. This may mean the brand is a legitimate insider in a particular community (e.g., the LGBT community), or an expression of a certain place or time (e.g., see the Shinola Detroit case in Chapter 12), or individual (e.g., Chanel continues to link each new season back to its enigmatic founder, Coco Chanel). This is particularly important for storytelling, which helps reinforce the brand's position (see Chapter 6), and also presents challenges when felt connections get broken (see the Kat von D case at the end of this chapter).

These three types of authenticity are best thought of as standards, and brand managers may draw on all three at once, or give greater emphasis to one depending on the particular brand challenge. We will expand on each of these standards throughout the text to identify how new brands can enhance their authenticity (Chapter 5), tell convincing stories, and be more consistent (Chapter 6), rebuild lost equity through relevance (Chapter 8), become part of a community (Chapter 9), act with purpose (Chapter 11), and avoid crisis (Chapter 12). In Chapter 8, we will also see how these can be used creatively to generate new brand meaning and open up new markets for the brand. In the next chapter we shall use these to build the key strategic framework that will flow throughout the entire book.

IS ALL BRAND CONSUMPTION DRIVEN BY IDENTITY?

At the end of this chapter, it is fair to ask whether all consumers or users choose *visible* brands because of their identity goals. Traditionally, people have used the construct of "involvement" to examine brand motives (Rosenbaum-Elliot et al. 2015). Involvement relates to the degree of interest consumers have in the product or service category and also the degree of risk associated

with getting things wrong. Therefore, a house purchase (for some) is a high-involvement category because of the risk involved and presumably because it is "one's home" and intensely personal. In contrast, baking soda may be viewed as a low-involvement purchase as it is largely a commodity and the risk of getting the choice wrong is low because of the product's inherent functionality. The latter types of brands are often called "invisible brands" or mundane brands that essentially blend into the background of one's life. Jennifer Coupland (2005) studied these brands and found that although they lacked a strong identity, they did not lack meaning. Instead, their very ordinariness meant they essentially became taken for granted within the household. These brands are typically household items and usually sold under a buyer-own-brand in supermarkets. So, do they lack symbolism?

One has to be careful in viewing certain types of product classes or brands as intrinsically lacking or having symbolic value. McCracken (1990) has noted that products tell you very little, and in the case of invisible brands their users saw them symbolically as reflective of an identity as a "good housekeeper" or "good cook." Although the brands faded into the background, the household was never without them for long, and in this sense, despite being mundane, they have important identity value, particularly since many are handed down from parent to child over multiple generations. Fournier's (1998) work on brand relationships noted that consumers might have highly emotional relationships with seemingly mundane products such as lipsticks or toothpastes. Although these brands seem mundane and we may be unaware of their presence, they do have "unrecognized loyalty" that only becomes conscious when they are changed or discontinued. The Internet after all is replete with "bring back" pages dedicated to discontinued confectionery, makeup, and other seemingly low-involvement brands.

Likewise, studies on consumption and identity typically occur in upper income and middle income economies where basic needs are satisfied. But what about where this is not the case? What about the choices of children and young adults? Or those consumers at the margins of society? Although these are important questions, as economies develop, brand choice quickly becomes driven by symbolic value.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has examined the motivation for brand choice, the ways different views of the consumer lead to different approaches to building brand value, and identified the importance of authenticity to co-creation. Although it has not discounted the importance of functional benefits, rational appeals, or information efficiency, we believe these classical cues are more points of parity for all brands, especially given the speed of convergence in many markets. Not only are these types of appeals hard to sustain over time, they also ignore consumer-identity goals, and therefore risk being seen as irrelevant by users. Instead we propose that brands are judged valuable if they help users signal identity and provide them with linking value. Building on this, believable authenticity is the basis of brand co-creation, and this involves creating narratives that allow users to be themselves or fit in (or both). Achieving this, brand managers must try and achieve three types of authenticity: consistency, conformity, and connection. The implications of these types of value for our understanding of brand equity form the basis of the next chapter.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Identify a situation where your consumption is solid, and one where it is liquid. What brands are useful in each case? How are the values of each different for you?

2. Identify examples for each of the eight approaches to brand building.

3. Compare an example of a brand you have become more favorable towards and one that has declined. Why did the relationship change?

4. Compare two brands you use in terms of personality. What distinguishes each? How do they communicate their personality?

5. Think of a brand that stresses "authenticity." Examine its claims. Are they really true? If not, does it matter to you? Which of the claims relate to consistency, conformity, and connection?

CASE EXAMPLE: KAT VON D BECOMES KVD

Kat von D first rose to fame in 2005 as a tattoo artist starring in the TLC reality TV show *Miami Ink*. The show documented events at the tattoo studio 305 Ink, where she was one of the resident artists. Two years later she acquired her own show with the network, *LA Ink*, set in her own studio in Hollywood. The first episode attracted a viewer count of 1.5 million and a rating of 2.6 among adults aged 18–35, making it the highest rated series premiere in the history of TLC at the time. The show ran for four seasons, ending in 2011. Further cementing her fame were the MusikInk Tattoo and Convention and Music Festival she initiated in 2008 and the two books she published in 2009 and 2010 (both of which made the top 10 in the *New York Times* Best Seller list). With fans increasingly interested in her personal life, she became a regular with celebrity gossip columns (Loveland 2018).

Fans were also very interested in Kat's personal style, including her signature makeup look of bold red lipstick paired with a 50s style liquid eyeliner. In an interview with *Racked*, she recounts receiving a call from a Sephora executive who told her that sales associates at Sephora were overwhelmed with customers coming into the shop looking for the red lipstick worn by that "tattoo girl" on television and invited her to the Sephora headquarters for a meeting (Wischhover 2017).

In 2008 Kat von D teamed up with Kendo, a beauty brand accelerator under the LVMH umbrella, to launch Kat von D Beauty. Sold exclusively through Sephora, the brand started out with four red lipsticks, and gradually expanded with more colors inspired by the inks Kat used in her studio, and products such as the Tattoo Concealer which, as the name suggests, could even cover tattoos. The brand proved to be very sought after by consumers, with certain products, such as the liquid lipstick in the shade "Lolita," being always out of stock at Sephora, and others, such as the liquid liner (Tattoo liner), consistently finding a place on Sephora's yearly best seller lists.

Kat was heavily involved in all aspects of the brand. In a 2016 interview with *Create & Cultivate*, she stated:

I don't have absolutely any interest in pouring myself into anything if I'm not going to do it 110%. So there are a lot of people who just want to put their name on something, they don't show up, just collect a pay check, and hope it does well. As for me, [I'm] somewhat micromanaging but creatively involved in the entire process.

Her personal taste was evident not only in the unconventional, highly saturated colors and full coverage finishes, but also in the product names (the Studded Kiss lipstick line, for example, includes shades in "Ozzy" and "Motörhead." of whom Kat is a big fan). She also designed the packaging and artwork for the products, using imagery and gothic lettering reminiscent of her tattoo work and, at times, making more personal references to her life (the monochromatic black studded lipstick packaging, for example, is inspired by her favorite bracelet, the Saint & Sinner palette draws on her Catholic upbringing, and the thirteenth-century wax seal on the powder compact comes from a love of letter writing). Figure 2.5 provides details. Kat von D Beauty was cruelty-free from the start, and the majority of the line was vegan with the exception of several items containing beeswax and carmine. In 2016, the entire line was formulated to be 100% vegan in line with Kat's personal beliefs (a life-long vegetarian, she had been vegan for several years at the time).

FIGURE 2.5   Kat von D packaging

Source: Image courtesy of Jamie (aka petitepanoply) via wikicommons, shared under the CC BY-SA 2.0 license

By 2017, Kat von D Beauty had over 350 SKUs, also sold on the brand's own website as well as in stores in over 30 countries, primarily at Sephora locations. The growth of the brand was not without controversy, however. Several product names were criticized for being inappropriate—"Underage Red" for trivializing pedophilia, "Selektion" for making references to Nazi Germany (renamed after a social media backlash), and "Celebutard" for degrading disabled people (pulled from Sephora in 2013) (Rasmus 2013; Sharma 2019; Stoeffel 2013). In 2016,

Kat's social media feud with beauty influencer, fellow beauty brand owner and former friend (after whom she had named a lipstick) Jeffree Star also created some negative PR (Connell 2017; Stalder 2018).

In 2017 the openly anti-Trump Kat von D allegedly disqualified the winner of an Instagram contest after being informed of a pro-Trump post she had posted on her social media. The contest was intended to celebrate the relaunch of the brand's Saint and Sinner fragrances, and asked makeup artists to create looks inspired by them. Although all information on the contest was removed from the brand's website and social media, Kat von D denied the disqualification rumors on her personal Instagram, stating that she had contacted the artist to share her feelings about the subject and that the winner did not attend the launch party (the big prize) on her own volition (Loveland 2018).

In 2018, an Instagram post sparked what turned out to be arguably her biggest controversy yet. In the post, a heavily pregnant KvD, exasperated with other people not respecting her life choices and offering unsolicited advice on how she should go about giving birth to and raising her child, stated that she had "the intention of raising a vegan child, without vaccinations." The (since deleted) post opened up a flurry of criticism, and received over 800,000 comments, the overwhelming majority accusing Kat von D of being an anti-vaxxer and putting others' lives at risk (see Figure 2.6). In the follow-up post two days later (this time closed to comments), Kat von D denied any anti-vaxxer claims, stating "Just because we have hesitancies and valid concerns about injecting our baby with specific chemicals and toxins does not mean we are anti anything," and expressing her distrust of pharmaceutical companies "who have much to gain from an industry worth billions."
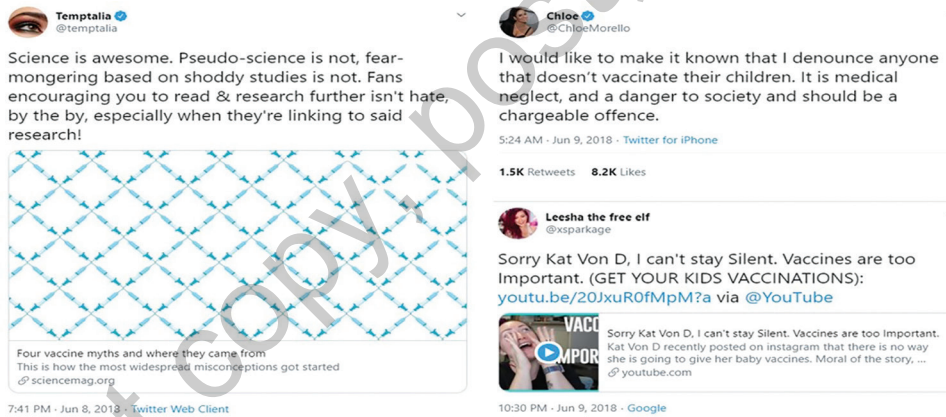

FIGURE 2.6   Fan reaction to anti-vax stance

However, this did little to ease the backlash, with many customers taking to social media to announce that they would no longer buy from the brand. Arguably due to pressure from viewers or fearing anti-vaxxer allegations themselves, influential names in the beauty community also followed suit. Some were subtle in their reaction, reiterating the scientific basis for vaccinations and indicating their pro-vaccine stance. Others adopted a more dramatic tone, condemning Kat von D for her irresponsible and selfish behavior, announcing that they would no longer use Kat von D Beauty products or feature the brand on their social media, and urging others to do the same. Discussion platforms such as reddit kept a close eye on influencers' reactions as

(Continued)

events unfolded (there is a thread entitled "List of influencers who have supported or denounced KVD after vaccination comments" (reddit user n.d. b) on BeautyGuruChatter, a popular sub–reddit where users discuss "beautubers and beauty related content, beauty guru brand owners, and other social media influencers"), and the brand's products started to be heavily featured in "makeup declutter" videos on YouTube.

On January 16, 2020, Kat von D posted an announcement on her personal IG account informing her fans that she was selling her shares and relinquishing control of Kat von D Beauty to the parent company Kendo, attributing her decision to personal and other professional commitments that prevented her from giving full attention to the brand (Figure 2.7). Her announcement was closely followed by a post on the brand's IG account, which confirmed the news and announced that the makeup line had been renamed and rebranded into KDV Vegan Beauty (which, as the brand announced in another IG post almost two weeks later, stood for "Kindness, Vegan Beauty + Discovery (and Doing good)" rather than anyone's initials):

> David Suliteanu, CEO, Kendo, states, "I want to thank Kat for helping to change the beauty industry with us. The products we created together have stood the test of time … Kendo, along with our global retail partner, Sephora, look forward to the continued growth of KVD Vegan Beauty under Kendo's leadership, ownership, and direction. We are fully positioned to continue the brand's growth and development in both product and marketing. We have developed a very strong product pipeline for 2020 and beyond. The same Kendo team that made history with KVD Vegan Beauty is ready to do it again." (Beauty Packaging Staff 2020)

The brand assured loyal customers that products would not be discontinued or formulas changed due to the rebranding. They also kept the packaging, most of which was designed by Kat von D herself and reflected her personal aesthetic, but informed customers that the packaging would only be updated once the existing inventory depleted so as not to create unnecessary waste.
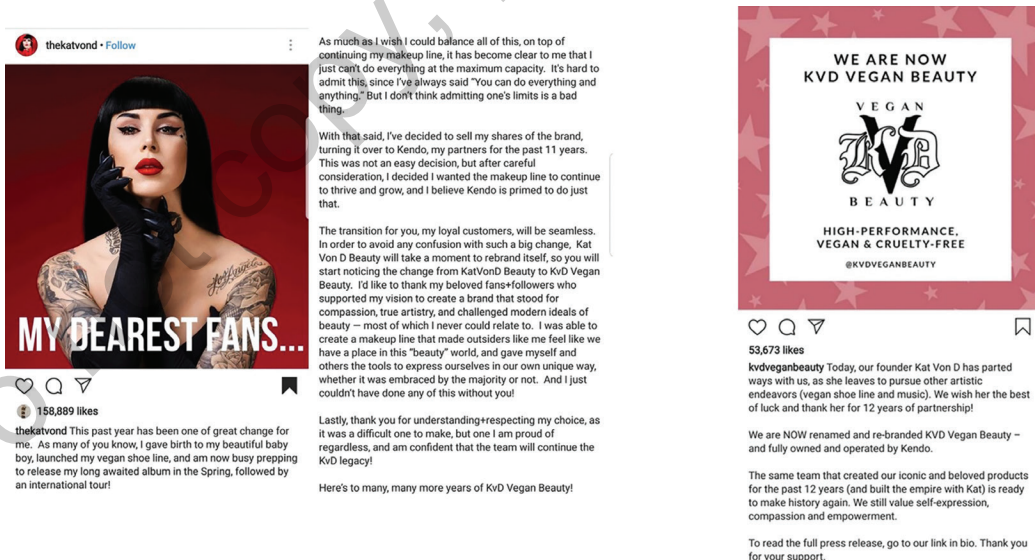

FIGURE 2.7   Sale and name change

The departure of Kat von D and the rebranding of KVD Vegan Beauty received mixed responses from customers and the broader beauty community. Some were delighted that they could purchase from the brand again, now that doing so did not mean supporting someone whose views they did not agree with. Others were skeptical, needing more reassurance that Kat von D would not be benefiting from sales. Some former fans of the brand had already found "holy grail" products in other brands to replace old KvD Beauty favorites and had little reason to go back.

The rebranding itself was met with mixed reactions and doubts about whether it allowed the brand to make a clear break from its past. While beauty enthusiasts acknowledged the brand's side of the story about temporarily keeping the old packaging, they also pointed out that the designs still reminded them too much of the former owner (similar issues were raised about the logo and some cult products that were still very strongly associated with her). The prevailing sentiment was skepticism that the brand could ever dissociate itself from its former face while effectively keeping her initials as the brand name. The official explanation of what the brand name stood for was met with incredulity, with commentators calling it out as a forced attempt at justifying keeping the initials. As one user comments in the "It does *not* stand for a person's initials..." thread in the BeautyGuruChatter sub-reddit (see Figure 2.8), "Because it was never their plan for that acronym to stand for that. They clearly saw people pissed that it still had her name, so quickly scrambled around to find something else that KVD could stand for. Seriously, they should have just told the truth – they don't wanna waste all that packaging." Another asks, "Kendo Vegan Beauty wasn't an option......?" (reddit user n.d. a).

> **M3ghan_** 🔖 269 points · 3 months ago
> I was just looking at what was new on Sephora and there was a new blush and as the title says, they have switched it over to KVD Vegan Beauty.
>
> Side note: I do hope they change their packaging and such. I just still see Kat Von D when I look at the products and it makes me feel as if I'd be buying a product from her if that makes any sense

> **agent_narwhal** 1 point · 3 months ago
> With the rebrand, will KVD still receive any profit? Ludwig is one of my favorite lip colors that i can't find a dupe for on my lips, but I won't buy it knowing she makes any profit from it.

> **ickyickypoo** 2 points · 3 months ago
> Because it was never their plan for that acronym to stand for that. They clearly saw people pissed that it still had her name, so quickly scrambled around to find something else that KVD could stand for.
>
> Seriously, they should have just told the truth - they don't wanna waste all that packaging.

(Continued)

FIGURE 2.8   (Continued)

> ▲ tyallie 10 points · 3 months ago
> ▼ I don't care what they call it, I'm just glad I can
>   repurchase my eyeliner without funding an anti-vaxxer.

> ▲ MuchSun8 7 points · 3 months ago
> ▼ I'm still skeptical Kat Von D won't be getting money from
>   this even though she publically has stepped back. I'm
>   interested in the rebrand and what they may come out
>   with in the future, but it's been so long of not buying it
>   there are tons of other brands out there which are either
>   dupes or good alternatives. Like back when she first
>   started this brand it was so cool and new but with the
>   flooded market now- it's not exactly unique anymore.

> ▲ just_a_sad_turtle_ 260 points · 3 months ago
> ▼ Kendo Vegan Beauty wasn't an option.......?

> ▲ el_99 3 points · 3 months ago
> ▼ So, they basically changed the title to the initials of Kat
>   Von D and got rid of the awful person behind this, but
>   still can't change their packaging? I don't know if it's only
>   me, but when I am still disgusted by the packaging
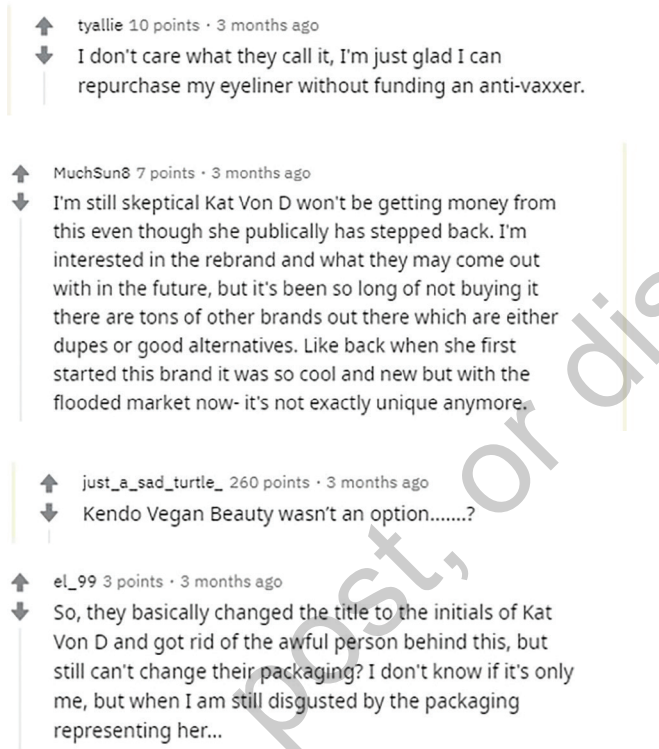>   representing her...

FIGURE 2.8   Fan reaction to rename

Case written by Pınar Cankurtaran (Delft Technical University)

Case Questions

1. Identify the core brand associations for Kat von D and how these are translated to her personal brand.

2. Describe the Kat von D brand personality.

3. How did Kat von D engage in self-authentication through being herself and fitting in? Provide examples. What happened when being oneself failed to take account of the need to fit in?

4. Drawing on an understanding of authenticity, explain why users reacted so strongly to Kat von D's anti-vaccination stance?

5. Assess the reaction of the brand's owner, Kendo, in rebranding to KVD Vegan Beauty? What was gained and what was lost in the rebrand?

KEY TERMS

Authenticating acts (being one's self)

Authenticity

Authoritative performances (fitting in)

Business to Business (B2B) users

Extended self

Linking value

Liquid consumption

Solid consumption

Symbolic value

Value in use

GO ONLINE

Visit **https://study.sagepub.com/beverland2e** to access:

- exclusive videos from a real-life creative agency
- free journal articles
- links to interesting web articles and videos related to this chapter.

FURTHER READING

Avery, Jill, Susan Fournier, and John Wittenbraker (2014), "Unlock the Mysteries of Your Customer Relationships," *Harvard Business Review*, 92(7/8), 72–81.

Beverland, Michael B. and Francis J. Farrelly (2010), "The Quest for Authenticity in Consumption: Consumers' Purposive Choice of Authentic Cues to Shape Experienced Outcomes," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 36(5), 838–856.

Christensen, Clayton M., Taddy Hall, Karen Dillon, Karen and David S. Duncan (2016), "Know Your Customers' 'Jobs to be Done,'" *Harvard Business Review*, 94(9), 54–60.

Eckhardt, Giana M. and Fleura Bardhi (2020), "New Dynamics of Social Status and Distinction," *Marketing Theory*, 20(1), 85–102.

Keller, Kevin Lane (2020), "Consumer Research Insights on Brands and Branding: A JCR Curation," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 46(5), 995–1001.