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The brand personality dimensions of business-to-business firms: a content analysis of employer reviews on social media

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to explore the brand personalities that employees are creating of their employer brands, in particular business-to-business (B-to-B) brands, when describing these brands on social media. We examine how the brand personalities, based on written online reviews, differ between high- and low-ranked, and high- and low-rated brands.

Methodology/Approach: 6,300 written employee reviews from a social media platform, Glassdoor, are used for content analysis in DICTION, to determine the brand personality dimensions they communicate (J. L). An independent B-to-B brand ranking data source, Brandwatch, is used as a reference to various brands' level of ranking, while an ANOVA test is used to determine whether there is a difference in the brand personality trait means when comparing high and low-ranked, and high- and low-rated brands.

Findings: Our findings suggest that a strong social media presence does not equate to a strong employer brand personality perception among employees, since there are no significant differences between B-to-B firms based on their rankings.

Research Implications: Extant literature has mostly explored the impact of either critical reviews or favourable customer ratings and reviews on company performance, with very little research focusing on the B-to-B context. In addition, research employing DICTION for the purposes of content analysis of reviews is sparse. The methodology used in this study could thus be employed to further compare and contrast the reviews from a single company, dividing top and low starred reviews to compare discrepancies.

Practical Implications: The results of this study show how online shared employee experiences of employer brands contribute to the formation of a distinct employer brand personality. From a managerial viewpoint, engaging with current and past employees and being cognizant of the online narratives that they share on social media, may be an early indicator of where the firm is lacking (or showing strength) in its' employee engagement. This would offer a way for firms to both understand their employer brand personality as well as gauge how they compare to top employers in a specific sector or industry.

Originality/Value/Contribution: The study attempts to grow the literature of employee brand engagement in a B-to-B context, by recognizing the important role that employees play in engaging with their employer brand online. Two main contributions are offered. The first contribution relates to the finding that employees perceive highly-rated B-to-B brands as being more competent, exciting, sincere and sophisticated than low-rated B-to-B brands. Second, the methodology used in this study proves to be a novel and accurate way of comparing employee reviews and perceived employer brand personality, with the employer-created intended brand image.

Introduction

Brand personality, or the set of human characteristics that are attributed to a brand name, can represent how customers relate to a particular brand. Specifically, when a company exhibits an effective and consistent brand personality, customers can form emotional or rational attachments to the brand, which in turn increases brand equity (Keller and Richey 2006; McCracken 1993) More recently, researchers have studied these concepts in relation to brand engagement – the process of constructing an emotional or rational attachment between a customer, or other stakeholders, and a brand (Bhattacharya, Sen, and Korschun 2011; Leckie, Nyadzayo, and Johnson 2016; Xu et al. 2016). With the advent of the internet and social media with its inherent ability to support relational value creation,

brand engagement has changed dramatically (Boyd and Spekman 2004). Acknowledging that it is a still maturing space, customers are more frequently using social media platforms to connect with brands (Sievert and Scholz 2017) and these platforms equally allow both the brand and its customers to generate and absorb content. In other words, customers can post about their experience with a brand, read other customers' reviews of a brand, and absorb content generated from the brands that engage them.

While the most common and established social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, there are also more specialized platforms, such as Instagram and Pinterest for sharing photos and ideas. Other platforms such as TripAdvisor, allow consumers to share information about travel and hospitality experiences through ratings and reviews. These rating and reviewing platforms have gained a considerable amount of influence and attention over the last ten years. Indeed, it has become quite common for travelers to consult services such as TripAdvisor before staying at a particular hotel or taking a tour while on vacation (Zervas, Proserpio, and Byers 2015). The same can be seen with other products and services since social media platforms have allowed customers to see what others say about a brand before making a purchasing decision. Therefore, companies are well advised to consider the importance of such platforms in shaping brand personality, especially since brands often have little or no control over the content of customer reviews on these platforms (Paschen et al. 2017).

A considerable amount of research has investigated consumer engagement on social media platforms (Leckie, Nyadzayo, and Johnson 2016; Kumar and Pansari 2016; Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie 2014), with less attention being given to other stakeholders, such as employees. However, employees also engage with brands online – including their employer brand on social media. Additionally, most of the research has focused on B-to-C (business-to-consumer) brands as opposed to B-to-B (business-to-business) brands, with literature suggesting that B-to-B organizations have taken longer than their B-to-C counterparts take advantage of the brand supporting potential of social media (Huotari et al. 2015; Michaelidou,

Siamagka, and Christodoulides 2011). Recognizing the important role that employees play in engaging with their employer brand online and attempting to grow the literature in the industrial marketing area, our study uses the five brand personality dimensions (Aaker 1997) as a new lens to view B-to-B employee brand engagement online. This research underscores the increasing influence that employees have in creating and portraying brand personalities, and reveals important managerial implications with regards to employee brand engagement on social media platforms.

The paper is structured as follows: we begin with a brief review of the literature on employer branding, with an emphasis on the various multi-dimensional brand building elements contributing to employer brand associations, in particular, employer brand personality. Thereafter, we discuss employee brand engagement, with employee brand engagement on social media specifically being explored. Literature on the brand personality dimensions, as first proposed by Aaker (1997) is then reviewed, followed by the theoretical framework on brand personality, which was used to guide this research. Then, we describe the data sources: Glassdoor – a social media platform for employee reviews of employers, and Brandwatch – a social media analytics company that publishes rankings of B-to-B brands on social media, as well as the data analysis tool, DICTION. The results are then presented and discussed, with the accompanying conclusions drawn from our study. Finally, we present managerial and theoretical implications regarding employee brand engagement and brand personality in the B-to-B environment and provide suggestions for future research.

Literature review

Employer branding

Employer branding has become a key managerial focus point as firms growingly appreciate the value of human resources as an intangible asset (Kissel and Büttgen 2015). Fierce competition among companies to attract and retain talent has led to intensified efforts to actively improve one's employer brand (Tanwar and Prasad 2017). As such, the topic has become a subject of intense

interest among practitioners and academics and refers to "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company" (Ambler and Barrow 1996, 187). Developing an employer brand has the objective of creating a differentiated and unique identity (Backhaus, Tikoo, and Cheng 2004). It would encompass functional attributes, which are the characteristics related to the actual job or organization, as well as symbolic attributes, referring to the identity, image, personality and values of the organization (Lievens and Highhouse 2003).

Merely focusing on the functional attributes (e.g. remuneration, location, job description), however, is not enough to create a strong employer brand. Instead, literature asserts that organizations must differentiate themselves based on the psychological advantages – constructs related to self-expression and identity – which brings the core values connected to the brand into play (Lievens and Highhouse 2003; Näppä, Farshid, and Foster 2014; Sivertzen, Nilsen, and Olafsen 2013). An employer brand is in other words composed of a number of defining and related constructs. Kissel and Büttgen (2015) propose that employer brand personality is an integral part of a brand's identity, which employees perceive to be embedded in its brand image – all of which are essential components of a strong employer brand (Lievens and Slaughter 2016). Previous literature has shown a clear connection between the various constructs (Kissel and Büttgen 2015; Lievens, Van Hoye, and Anseel 2007; Rampl and Kenning 2014). There are, however, also clear differences. Due to this multidimensionality and in service of construct clarity, a delineation of these contributing brand building constructs, which collectively define the employer brand domain, is reviewed.

Employer brand identity and employer brand image

The distinction between brand identity and brand image has often been misunderstood and nebulously defined (Ind 1992; van Riel and Balmer 1997). From the perspective of organizational attractiveness in employer branding, Lievens and Slaughter (2016) argue that it is not only of semantic significance but also of marketing importance to better understand the differences, in order to leverage the strengths that each affords the firm's branding efforts. The authors propose that the employer brand identity represents an insider's attributed mental representation of an organization as an employer, whereas the employer brand image represents an outsider's mental representation of attributes related to the organization as an employer. Identity thus refers to the key characteristics of the company as perceived by the employees, and therefore internal employer branding. Image looks at the perceptions of outsiders, thus external employer branding, as it seeks to manage outsiders' mental associations of the company as an employer.

This corresponds with the prevailing literature in the organizational branding domain. Organizational brand identity represents the internally created meaning of the brand, as put forward by the firm, i.e. the organization is responsible for creating a differentiated and unique identity (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000; Kapferer 2008). Brand image, in contrast, refers to the externally held consumer perceptions and interpretation of the brand's identity (Geuens, Weijters, and De Wulf 2009; Keller 2003; Nandan 2005). This set of associations is also referred to as "intended image", which is communicated externally in order to create a favorable brand image among the key stakeholders (Brown et al. 2006). Congruence between brand identity and the brand image thus implies that the brand is well-understood and that the stakeholders are in agreement with the brand message (Nandan 2005). Attracting employees who identify with and feel a personal connection to the communicated brand image, can hence narrow the gap between the organization's identity and intended image.

Inferred from the preceding delineation, an employer's brand image is externally constructed, based on subjective perceptions and associations about the brand. Brown et al. (2006), however, emphasize the unique role that employees play in the formation of these perceptions, as they are a part of the organization, viewing it from the inside, yet also representing it to those outside of it. Geuens, Weijters, and De Wulf (2009) assert that brand identity and brand image are mostly conceptualized as being multidimensional constructs, of which brand personality is an important

component. Gardner and Levy (1955) profess the necessity of an overall brand personality in their seminal article on brand conception, while Herzog (1963) contend that brand personality is the combination of all stakeholders' brand image impressions. Plummer (1985), in his classic article, *How Personality Makes a Difference*, proposes the theory that a brand's personality represents the not purely functional nor physical, but more affective part of a brand image – and that *this* determines the brand's appeal. Ultimately, Tom (1971, 575) highlights the "congruence between personality patterns and the 'image' of the firm as the major determinant of organizational choice", with Rojas-Méndez, Hine, and Rod (2017) arguing that brand personality is the human side of a brand image.

Employer brand personality and employer brand positioning

Human personality characteristics have long been used to explore and describe the intangible aspects of an organization's brand image (Fournier 1998; Keller and Lehman 2006). Ascribing and applying these traits to employer brands is thus a natural progression. From a theoretical perspective, Rampl and Kenning (2014) propose that an employer fulfils a central role in the formation of an employee's social identity and self-concept. The authors show that employees may use the brand personality of their employer as an agent through which to communicate social status or express moral values. In the same vein, an organization leverages their employer brand personality to convey the symbolic identity of their employer brand to potential employees (Sirianni et al. 2013). Echoing Ries and Trout (1981) classic positioning mantra – the employer thus strategically positions or "sells" their employer brand personality to potential applicants or employees.

In assessing the importance of corporate brand personality traits to business success, Keller and Richey (2006) stress that an organization's brand personality is determined and embodied by its employees, as it reflects the values, actions and words of these employees, individually and collectively. The management of an organization's extrinsic corporate reputation is essentially also brought into bearing with its perceived employer brand personality, with Chun (2005), asserting that it conveys the "relevant stakeholders' perceptions or impression of the organization rather than any financial figure or performance". This, however, can only be achieved when the employer brand personality is well-understood and appreciated by all relevant stakeholders. The firm's brand values should, therefore, be truthful, to reflect the company culture accurately and to represent an authentic employer brand. In doing so, making it easier to attract employees who share the same brand values and feel a fit between the organization and their own identity (Hurrell and Scholarios 2014).

By aligning the corporate, employer and internal brand activities, it is possible to communicate a coherent, differentiated brand message, and organizations invest significant time and effort to support and add symbolic meaning to their employer brand positioning and image. Most employer brand encounters can be managed by the marketer and can serve to promote and accomplish key brand associations in stakeholders' minds (Keller and Lehman 2006). With the proliferation of social media, brands are facing the modern-day reality of an increase in employee brand encounters that fall outside of their firm-managed brand positioning strategies (Sirianni et al. 2013). It does, however, create opportunities for positive brand engagement leverage, with Dromey (2014, 9), stating that social communication tools enable employers to communicate a "strong, transparent and explicit" corporate culture. Bridger (2014, 232), furthermore asserts that "employee voice is a key enabler of employee engagement and social media offers both employees and organizations some brilliant tools to work with voice."

Employee brand engagement and social media

Defined broadly, brand engagement represents the reciprocal interaction between a stakeholder, such as an employee, and an engagement object such as the employer brand or firm (Yang et al. 2016). The interaction is characterized by a cognitive, emotional and behavioural investment (L. Hollebeek 2011) in that it is an interactive and often co-creative brand experience (Brodie et al. 2011). Kumar and Pansari (2016) explain that engagement is defined by a level of connectedness, while Hoeffler and Keller (2002) assert that brand

engagement is a strong indicator of brand loyalty, as stakeholders willingly invest resources (e.g. time, money, effort) in their involvement with the brand. It is observable in the literature that stakeholders are active participants in the brand engagement process (L. D. Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie 2014) and their psychological investment in the brand is thus a major influencing element in the engagement experience.

In dynamic business environments, effective brand engagement is important as it not only impacts the stakeholder's behavior but also the sales and profitability, and ultimately, the brand equity of the firm (Bendixen, Bukasa, and Abratt 2004; Pitt et al. 2017). Brand equity relates to the marketing and financial value of a brand based on stakeholders' association with the brand, for example, level of awareness, loyalty and quality perceptions (Aaker 1991). Developing brand equity thus strengthens strategic competitive advantage (Kim et al. 1999) and in the long run, accumulated equity results in profitability and brand advocacy (Goldsmith and Goldsmith 2012). This is particularly applicable to employees as the stakeholders. Schaufeli et al. (2002, 465) describe employee engagement as activities that reflect "a positive, fulfilling work-related mindset". As Sievert and Scholz (2017, 894) suggest, "in an increasingly disengaged world, companies need to engage with their employees, at the very least in order to boost loyalty and productivity". The rationale underlying this assertion is that an engaged employee has a vital role to play in shaping the public's perception of their employer brand.

Existing research on the use of social media for the purpose of employee engagement has mostly had an intra-organizational focus, with the emphasis being on the influence of social media usage on employees. The scope of studies include, the potential of social media engagement to improve employer brand perception among a younger generational workforce (Dutta 2014); the benefits and limitations of social media usage at work (Leonardi, Huysman, and Steinfield 2013); the use of social media instead of other forms of internal communication (Friedl and Tkalac 2011); and the influence of social media on relational connectedness among employees (Smith et al. 2017). The use of social media in employer branding practices has been researched from multiple aspects, especially in enhancing employer attractiveness and boosting recruitment (Sivertzen, Nilsen, and Olafsen 2013), as well as in engaging with employees outside of the workplace (Dabirian, Kietzmann, and Diba 2017; Tanwar and Prasad 2017; Pitt et al. 2017)

When exploring online employee brand engagement, it is important to understand some fundamental characteristics of social media engagement. Specifically, social media engagement can vary from shallow to deep, depending on the context and quality of the experience (O'Brien 2016). Furthermore, social media engagement also differs from usage, as O'Brien (2016) argues that usage entails the evaluation of content, whereas engagement requires emotional or cognitive absorption. In plain terms, engagement does not implicitly form part of every social media interaction and Hewitt (2017) cautions that employee engagement should not be confused with satisfaction or happiness. Indeed, Pitt et al. (2017) found that although some employees spoke highly of their employer brand when engaging with them online, others critiqued their employer brand with more aggressive, negative language. This highlights the unspoken terms of brand engagement via social media, where the brand has little control over the nature of the conversation (or review), yet it has the potential to materially affect the corporate reputation and the overall employer brand.

Not only have technological advancements like social media made it easier for employees to engage with their employer brands, but the engagement is visible and can be monitored. For example, platforms such as Glassdoor allow users to access reviews and ratings of employers written by employees (Glassdoor 2008). By viewing what employees are saying about them, the employer brand can gain valuable insights, which may not have been available before (Dabirian, Kietzmann, and Diba 2017). Indeed, former, current and potential employees are using online spaces such as Glassdoor, to both contribute and absorb valuable information relating to their and others' experiences of working for a particular brand (Dabirian, Kietzmann, and Diba 2017). For the employer, understanding what employees are saying about their employer brand on online

platforms is an important aspect of employee brand engagement. Online exchanges may reveal the level to which employees' perception of an employer brand is aligned with the intended brand persona that the firm wants employees and other stakeholders to see. The reciprocal exchange (Fournier 1998) between active relationship partners in a brand context, is explored in more detail in the next section which expounds on the concept of brand personality.

Brand personality dimensions

Brands are symbolic and people often associate brands with human personality traits. The process of anthropomorphizing, or associating human traits to non-human items, is what leads to the perception of personalities or identities associated with brands (Eisend and Stokburger-Sauer 2013; Pitt et al. 2007). The notion of brand personalities has been studied using different lenses over time. Literature builds on the observation that perceptions of brand personality traits can be created and influenced in the following two ways. Firstly, by direct contact with a brand, such as contact with people representing the brand (Fournier 1998); and secondly, by indirect contact with a brand, such as product category associations, the use of a logo, or the advertising method used (Batra, Lehman, and Singh 2013; Paschen et al. 2017). Fournier (1998) identified that individuals perceive brands relationally, in other words, the brand fulfilling the role of a relationship partner. Further, literature shows that brand personalities can impact preferences. The level of similarities between how individuals describe themselves and how they describe a brand influences the strength of preference for the brand (Sirgy 1982). Research also suggests that perceived brand personalities support the ability of an individual to articulate themselves (Belk 2013).

It is worth noting that the term personality has been associated with two different meanings in the field of psychology (Hogan, Hogan, and Roberts 1996). The first, denoted by "what I say about myself", refers to personality beliefs associated with a person's internal processes and dispositions (Pitt et al. 2007). Hogan, Hogan, and Roberts (1996) indicate that this is what shapes the behavior of people and therefore what a person says about themselves, provides inference to their personality. The second relates to a public view – thus how a person is perceived by others. This meaning of personality represents "what others say and think about me" (Opoku, Abratt, and Pitt 2006). Over time, these concepts have been adopted by the marketing field as intrinsic, "what the brand says about itself", and extrinsic, "what is said and thought about the brand" (Paschen et al. 2017). In our research, building on the J. L. Aaker (1997) brand personality framework, we apply the latter, *extrinsic* lens, by assessing a firm's brand personality through analyzing what its own employees say about it.

In 1997, Aaker (1997) developed a theoretical framework and measurement scale for brand personality dimensions, by leveraging the symbolic use of brands to distil associated brand personalities. Aaker used 114 personality traits, as adjectives describing a brand, for individual ratings of 37 brands by the 631 subjects in the United States. Five basic perceived brand personality trait dimensions emerged: *Sincerity* (down-to-earth, honest, sincere, friendly, wholesome, original); *Excitement* (young, daring, trendy, imaginative, unique; independent); *Competence* (leader, reliable, hard-working, corporate, intelligent, successful); *Sophistication* (glamorous, upper-class, charming, good-looking, feminine, smooth); *Ruggedness* (strong, tough, outdoorsy, Western, masculine). The brand personality scale (BPS) has proven to be a valid, reliable and generalizable scale for these dimensions (Aaker 1997; Keller and Richey 2006; Xu et al. 2016), and has inspired the majority of academic research on brand personality to date. The scale has received criticism and other measures have been developed to capture brand personalities (Austin, Siguaw, and Mattila 2003; Azoulay and Kapferer 2003; Geuens, Weijters, and De Wulf 2009). However, Aaker's BPS is the most widely adopted and it builds on the extrinsic perspective (Paschen et al. 2017). Hence, it was deemed most suitable for this study.

Aaker's initial definition of brand personality (Aaker 1997, 347), "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand", has subsequently been extended to describe how a firm is personified, in other words, how associations are formed

by customers to ascribe human personality characteristics to a firm (Chandler and Munday 2011). For the purposes of this paper, we build on this extended definition of firm brand personality and adapt it slightly, to define the term as *the set of human characteristics associated with a particular firm and how these are perceived by employees*. Employer brands that exhibit personality traits that match a prospective employee's actual or ideal personality, increases brand-liking of that employer brand (Kissel and Büttgen 2015) – with the converse also ringing true (Turban 2001). In a B-to-B setting, the employer brand personality might be shaped based on contact with a wide range of employees (Keller and Richey 2006), resulting in the brand personality transcending the individual products or services that the firm has on offer.

This offers managers of an employer brand the opportunity to mold the brand knowledge of prospective and current employees, in order to frame and represent a positive and distinct personality (Sirianni et al. 2013). Consequently, firm management benefit from understanding the brand personality associated with their firm, not only in as much as it ensures that it matches their intended image, but it also guides their employee marketing strategy. This research aims to provide practitioners with an additional toolset to evaluate their employer brand performance, by using online reviews to assess employee perceptions of their respective employer brand's personality traits, based on Aaker's brand personality dimensions.

Methodology

In this study, we examine how the brand personalities of B-to-B brands, as perceived by employees, differ between high- and low-ranking, and high- and low-rated companies online. The brand personalities were generated using sophisticated content analysis software to examine online reviews completed by employees on a social media platform called Glassdoor. The data was then grouped according to two independent ranking systems – the star rating on Glassdoor (one-star vs. five-star ratings) and the level of social media engagement according to Brandwatch (top 30 performing brands vs. bottom 30 performing brands). The purpose of using the two different

ranking systems to separate and analyze the data, was in order to overcome the possibility of common method bias (Mackenzie and Podsakoff 2012; Podsakoff et al. 2003). We elaborate further on our methodology below and give details on our data sources, data analysis and statistical techniques.

Data sources

The brand personalities for each employer brand were generated from content analysis of 6,300 employer reviews written by employees on the social media platform, Glassdoor (www.glassdoor.com). Glassdoor enables current and former employees to voluntarily and anonymously rate and review their companies, salaries, interview experience, senior management, and corporate benefits (Green et al. 2018). Contributing and sharing information on Glassdoor has a utilitarian value similar to posting reviews to Amazon or entering contributions to Wikipedia. Glassdoor reviews of a company include comments as well as employees' overall rating of a firm on a five-star scale, whereby one star is the worst and five stars are the best. In addition, optional star ratings can be given for *Career Opportunities, Compensation and Benefits, Work/Life Balance, Senior Management*, and *Cultures and Values*. Employees may also enter separate textual responses for pros ("Share some of the best reasons to work at …") and cons ("Share some of the downsides of working at …"), as well as a voluntary *Business Outlook* question ("Do you believe your company's business outlook will get better, stay the same or get worse in the next six months?"). This information provides users with a simple indication of the overall rating of the company, which can save them time when comparing a number of companies, as well as provide answers to certain frequently asked questions about a company before diving further into the reviews.

Glassdoor holds a database of millions of employer reviews, as well as CEO approval ratings, salary reports, earning potential, benefits reviews, interview reviews, sample questions, and more (Steckler 2016). It was decided to use Glassdoor as data source for this study, due to its comprehensive employer evaluation and popularity as a social media platform. Other platforms such as LinkedIn, do not provide the depth and quantity

of reviews, otherwise easily accessible on Glassdoor. Furthermore, since the reviews on Glassdoor are anonymous, users are able to obtain a realistic (or unfiltered) picture of what it is like to work at a particular company. In this way, reviewers, who are past or current employees, are encouraged to contribute to Glassdoor as reviews cannot be traced back and reviewers cannot be punished or praised by their employer for their review. However, it is worth noting that while discretion encourages participation, it may also result in inflated or exaggerated reviews.

Glassdoor is not immune to the polarization bias that is common with any online source for reviews. Previous research has established that online reviews tend to cluster around the extremes of high and low reviews (Aral 2014). In other words, individuals who are extremely satisfied or dissatisfied are more likely to write reviews than those who are neutral or just slightly satisfied/dissatisfied, resulting in a bimodal or "J-shaped" distribution (Hu, Pavlou, and Zhang 2009, 2017). In this way, there is likely to be an inherent response bias in the data from the reviews on Glassdoor as those individuals that write reviews tend to either love or hate their job. Considering the inherent polarization of online reviews, we have opted to mitigate some of this bias by analyzing the reviews in two groups – those rated high and those rated low, by two independent rating sources.

The first source for the company ratings is the five-star scale used by employees to rate firms on Glassdoor (as described above). The second source is an independent report of the top 200 B-to-B brands based on social media presence, produced by social media monitoring company, Brandwatch. According to its website, Brandwatch (2015) is a social intelligence company with powerful social media listening and analytics technology. Brandwatch produces regular reports of the top 200 B-to-B brands using its social media monitoring platform, which searches over 90 million web sources (e.g. news portals, social media networks, blogs and forums) for mentions of B-to-B brands. Multiple stakeholder inputs contribute to the ranking of brands on Brandwatch, based on social media brand presence and engagement. It should be noted that Brandwatch identifies B-to-B brands based on social media mentions or overall social media presence and it does not take into account other aspects of company performance, e.g. sales revenue.

Data analysis techniques

In this study, 6,300 job reviews written by employees of B-to-B companies were gathered from Glassdoor and content analysis was used to analyze the data. Content analysis is a technique for gathering and analyzing the content of a text to generate quantitative data according to a number of different characteristics such as words, meanings, ideas, themes or any message that can be communicated (Neuman 2003; Weber 1988). Content analysis has long been established as a useful method in the social sciences (Sinkovics, Penz, and Ghauri 2005) and has been used in research in a wide range of disciplines (Kassarjian 1977; Kolbe and Burnett 1991), including accounting (Barkemeyer et al. 2014), entrepreneurship (Parhankangas and Ehrlich 2014), strategy and marketing (Yadav, Prabhu, and Chandy 2007; Zachary et al. 2011).

The content analysis software used in this study was DICTION – a computer-aided text analysis program for determining the tone of a verbal message. DICTION was originally developed by political scientist and communications scholar, Roderick Hart (Hart 2009, 2008, 1984). Hart developed this software to reflect his proposed theoretical framework of verbal tone, which postulates that any written passage can be broken down into five themes: Activity, Optimism, Certainty, Realism, and Commonality. The purpose of this paper is to explore the Glassdoor reviews with a new lens, namely by using DICTION to analyze the data based on Aaker's five personality dimensions: Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness. To do this, custom dictionaries were used which were populated based on a list of 922 synonyms for Aaker's personality dimensions. These dictionaries were first created and used by Pitt et al. (2007). The authors engaged in a comprehensive process to identify, collect and compile synonyms for Aaker's (1997) five brand personality dimensions, starting with the 42 personality trait norms that she suggests should serve as an aid towards comparing brand personalities across different categories. Two independent researchers

developed the final list of 922 synonyms for the Pitt et al. (2007) study, which was then converted to digital form. With permission from the authors, the same dictionaries were used for the purpose of the present study. These dictionaries were incorporated into the DICTION software and content analysis was performed on the Glassdoor reviews to generate the brand personalities of the B-to-B firms from the reviews.

Statistical methods

The following research questions guided our statistical analysis of the content analysis:

(1) How do the brand personality dimensions (as perceived by employees) of high-ranking B-to-B firms differ from low-ranking B-to-B firms on Brandwatch?

(2) How do the brand personality dimensions of high-rated B-to-B firms differ from low-rated B-to-B firms on Glassdoor?

In order to evaluate these questions, we categorized the Glassdoor reviews into two pairs of comparison groups using both the Brandwatch rankings and the star ratings on Glassdoor. To reiterate, the ranking of a B-to-B company refers to its position against other similar firms by an independent source (Brandwatch), whereas the rating of a B-to-B company refers to stars awarded on Glassdoor, where one star represents the worst firms and five stars represent the best firms as perceived by employees. Note that Glassdoor was the source of both the reviews (data for content analysis) and ratings (second categorization).

For the comparison of brand personalities according to ranking, the *high-ranking* group consisted of the Glassdoor reviews of the top 30 of the 200 B-to-B companies ranked on Brandwatch, and the *low-ranking* group consisted of reviews in the bottom 30 companies. For the comparison of brand personalities according to rating, the *high-rated* group consisted of the Glassdoor reviews that had a five-star rating (for each of the top 30 and bottom 30 companies as ranked by Brandwatch), and the *low-rated* group consisted of the Glassdoor reviews that had a one-star rating (for each of the top 30 and bottom 30 companies as ranked by Brandwatch).

As many reviews as possible were identified to be used in the study and based on the Brandwatch rankings, we were able to identify and categorize the following: For top-ranked firms, 2,315 five-star and 1,983 one-star reviews; for bottom-ranked firms, 1,013 five-star and 1,025 one-star reviews. Once split into the four groups, summary statistics were performed as well as independent t-tests to compare the following: 1) brand personalities of high-ranking vs. low-ranking B-to-B brands (using Brandwatch categorization); and 2) brand personalities of high-rated vs. low-rated B-to-B brands (using Glassdoor star rating). In the following section, we will discuss the associated findings.

Results

Personality dimensions by rankings

To analyze the personality dimensions by ranking, reviews were taken from Glassdoor corresponding to the top 30 and bottom 30 firms ranked according to social media presence by Brandwatch. A total of 2,038 reviews of bottom-ranked firms and 4,298 reviews of top-ranked firms were analyzed in DICTION to determine personality traits on Aaker's five dimensions. An ANOVA test was used to determine whether there was a difference in the means of the two groups for each of the personality traits. Table 1 provides a summary of the results of these tests.

According to the results, high-ranking firms were found to be less competent, exciting, rugged, and sincere when compared with low-ranking firms. These differences were found to be significant on all of these dimensions, except competence. In other words, there was a significant difference ($p < .05$) between the high- and low-rated firms on the personality dimensions of excitement, ruggedness, and sincerity, with low-ranking firms scoring higher on these dimensions than high-ranking firms. Sophistication was the only one of Aaker's five dimensions in which high-ranking firms had a higher mean when compared with low-ranking firms and this finding was not significant.

Table 1. Results of Personality Dimensions Compared by Ranking.

Personality Dimension	Highly Ranked Firms		Low Ranked Firms		Independent Samples T-test		
	n	Mean	n	Mean	t	df	P (2-tailed)
Competence	4298	-0.00123	2038	0.00222	-0.12808	6334	0.8981
Excitement		-0.02294		0.04874	-2.66651	6334	0.0077
Ruggedness		-0.03756		0.07982	-4.18446	6334	<0.0001
Sincerity		-0.00136		0.09493	-3.58319	6334	0.0003
Sophistication		0.00738		-0.01637	0.883224	6334	0.3771

Significance at the p < .05 level.

Personality dimensions by rating

In assessing personality dimensions by rating, the results are quite different when the reviews were separated into those rated high and low by employees using the one- to five-star rating function on Glassdoor. These findings indicate that, when the reviews were separated by rating, a total of 3,008 one-star firms were compared with 3,328 five-star firms. Table 2 summarizes the results of the comparison between these two groups on the personality dimensions.

High-rated firms (i.e. those firms that received a five-star rating) were found to be more competent, exciting, sincere and sophisticated when compared with low-rated firms (i.e. those firms that received a one-star rating). The difference between the means of the two groups was significant (p < .05) for each of these dimensions. Ruggedness was the only dimension which showed a significant difference in terms of the mean, with low-rated firms having a higher mean than high-rated firms.

Discussion

One of the most significant findings of our study was the differing brand personality dimensions that emerged when employee reviews were analyzed based on the two different brand ranking systems, specifically, ranking based on brand presence by Brandwatch and star rating on Glassdoor. This difference may be driven in part by the fact that different stakeholders provide input to produce the two different rankings. As indicated in the methodology section, the ranking obtained from Brandwatch is based on social media platform engagement, which results from the input of multiple stakeholders from the business community, including customers and competitors, in addition to employees. On the other hand, the star ratings on Glassdoor are the result of employee input only. In this way, obtaining a high rank on Brandwatch can indicate a high level of brand engagement, but it does not necessarily mean that a brand is popular or highly-rated on Glassdoor (e.g. has a five-star rating) among employees. It is possible that the employer brand may display multiple brand personalities, depending on the point of view taken by the stakeholder group (e.g. a high ranking may indicate a perception of competence by customers but not by employees). This presents a word of caution to B-to-B firms, who may not fully understand the complexity of the multiple stakeholder views when they look at a ranking system such as Brandwatch. Therefore, in order to fully understand how different stakeholders view a brand, the firm must look across different platforms and ranking systems.

Other than pointing to the differences between a firm's ranking by an independent media rankings company, such as Brandwatch, and how the firm is actually seen by their employees, the results

Table 2. Results of Personality Dimensions Compared by Star Rating.

Personality Dimension	5-Star Rating		1-Star Rating		Independent Samples T-test		
	n	Mean	n	Mean	t	df	P (2-tailed)
Competence	3328	0.09387	3008	-0.10411	7.906544	6334	<0.0001
Excitement		0.03816		-0.04197	3.187977	6334	0.0014
Ruggedness		-0.03984		0.04449	-3.21228	6334	0.0013
Sincerity		0.09775		-0.04578	5.718997	6334	<0.0001
Sophistication		0.06029		-0.06725	5.078943	6334	<0.0001

Significance at the p < .05 level

also raise the following question: which one should the employer pay more attention to? From a managerial point of view in the context of creating a strong employer brand, external rankings based on brand presence alone may prove to be of lesser importance than what your employees are actually saying. When the B-to-B firms are grouped according to employee rating (rated high to low), the ratings may be perceived to denote a measure of employee satisfaction (J. Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004). Employees who view an employees' brand value propositions as attractive (i.e. positive valence) will most likely positively review the employer (Du Preez, Bendixen, and Abratt 2017). Level of employee satisfaction with employer brand may thus have an influence on ratings, which concomitantly will have an impact on all dimensions of brand personality. This aligns with recent literature that found that satisfied employees who engage with their employer brand, use more positive language when describing them (Green et al. 2018).

Looking at the associated set of human characteristics as per the BPS, the reviews of high-ranking B-to-B firms (according to social media mentions and overall social media presence as monitored by Brandwatch), showed a significant decrease in the brand personality dimensions of excitement, ruggedness and sincerity, in comparison to reviews of low-ranking B-to-B firms. The low-ranking B-to-B firms on Brandwatch are thus perceived to be more daring, spirited, imaginative and up-to-date (*excitement* brand personality dimension); more tough and outdoorsy (*ruggedness* brand personality dimension); and more down-to-earth, honest, genuine and cheerful (*sincerity* brand personality dimension). The difference in high- and low-ranking B-to-B firms' perceived brand personality traits based on the Brandwatch rankings may be ascribed to the fact that social media presence alone might not denote a strong or authentic employer brand. In order to gauge high- vs. low-ranking, the reviews contained in the respective categories may have included both one-star and five-star ratings. In other words, a high rank based on social media presence does not necessarily equate to a strong perceived employer brand.

Furthermore, previous research has asserted that the two most prominent brand personality dimensions of Aaker's BPS are *sincerity* and *excitement* (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004; Eisend and Stokburger-Sauer 2013; Japutra and Molinillo 2017). As per Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel (2004), these two dimensions are closely-related to warmth, vitality and status – all three important building blocks for interpersonal relationships (Fletcher et al. 1999). Incidentally, these two traits also accounted for the majority of variance in the initial personality ratings for brands (Aaker 1997). When comparing low-rated B-to-B firms (i.e. firms that received one-star reviews on Glassdoor) with high-rated B-to-B firms (i.e. firms that received five-star reviews on Glassdoor), high-rated employer brands are perceived to be more *competent, exciting, sincere* and *sophisticated*, while being less *rugged* than low-rated firms.

In this study, the brand persona emerges from the words used in reviews by former and current employees. It is important to consider that having a high or low score on a specific personality dimension does not necessarily imply "good" or "bad" personas. For example, despite the fact that the top rated employer brands were perceived to be less rugged, *ruggedness*, per se, is not necessarily a negative characteristic. The personality dimensions merely help to describe a brand persona and in certain industries or contexts, *ruggedness* can be a desirable characteristic. As a consumer brand persona, *ruggedness* denotes a tough and masculine brand. In an employer brand context, ruggedness may imply a highly competitive, tough employer brand.

Implications for business marketing practice

This study has begun to explore an issue many managers face today: employees are sharing their experiences of their employer brand online, which then contributes to the formation of the brand personality of the employer brand. Our research shows that the top employing companies, as rated by employees, are perceived as being more competent, exciting, sincere and sophisticated. It was also discovered that having a strong social media presence (a top rank on Brandwatch) does not automatically result in a strong employer brand personality (a personality that corresponds to those of top rated employers). The results from this study could indicate that merely being active

on social media platforms, does not necessarily create a positive attitude among current and potential employees toward an employer brand. Acknowledging that not many B-to-B firms might currently be very active on social media (Huotari et al. 2015; Michaelidou, Siamagka, and Christodoulides 2011), employee reviews via online platforms such as Glassdoor can provide valuable insights to employers about their internal brand image and persona, as well as reveal fundamental information about the firm to external parties in a transparent manner. B-to-B firms should thus carefully consider the content, context and roles of the various users and appreciate that their activities address different internal and external stakeholders.

From an employer-employee perspective, these platforms give a voice to current and former employees and enable them to share information that would ordinarily not be disclosed in face-to-face communication and/or exit interviews. Online reviews can be made anonymously, meaning that employees may feel safer about voicing their opinions about the employing company on social media, instead of discussing it with their managers or workplace representatives. Employer branding has gained much focus both in academia as well as among practitioners, and researchers and managers are seeking recipes for successful employer branding strategies by studying the world's most attractive employers. Many of these "most attractive employer" surveys are not based on employee insights, but on an evaluation of a firm's brand image and job seekers' intention to apply for a job. Employer brand image and employer brand desirability could, however, be a result of a combination of variables, including overall corporate brand, which may in part be influenced by online reviews. Previous research has shown that firms who communicate their core values in a manner that attracts like-minded employees, manage to create a differentiated employer brand and are better able to retain these employees (Hurrell and Scholarios 2014; Lievens and Highhouse 2003).

Extant literature has mostly explored the impact of either critical reviews (Basuroy, Chatterjee, and Ravid 2003) or negative and positive customer ratings and reviews on company performance (Hensens 2015), with very little research focusing on the B-to-B context. In addition, research

employing DICTION for the purposes of content analysis of reviews is sparse. The methodology used in this study could thus be employed to further compare and contrast the reviews from a single company, dividing top and low starred reviews to compare discrepancies. Managers need to engage their employees, as well as pay attention to (and possibly address) messaging that is provided by their current and past employees. Assessing the brand personality the firm displays may be used as an early indicator of where the firm is lacking or showing strength in its' employee engagement. Additionally, the method used in this study can also be developed to explore companies on an individual level, by extracting information on that specific company on Glassdoor. This would offer a way for firms to understand their brand personality and they could look for similarities with top employers in a specific sector or industry.

Limitations and future research

This paper contributes to the existing academic literature about employer branding and brand personality, with the following limitations considered. First, we recognize that our analysis is subject to the limitations of Glassdoor – including the inherent polarization bias that is common with voluntary online reviews, and because of this, we compared only high- and low-rated reviews. As a result, we have not accounted for the whole spectrum of reviews that are present and future research could explore those reviews in the mid-range of satisfaction ratings.

Second, we acknowledge that we present a general analysis, that does not explore the impact of firm attributes (e.g. industry, length of existence), the economic landscape, or respondent attributes (e.g. age, gender, current status with the employer, reasons for leaving the firm). We recommend further studies to determine whether our findings are industry agnostic, as well as what respondent factors may exacerbate or change a brand perception. It is possible that certain respondent attributes can have an effect on social media behavior, but also the perceptions of their employer.

Third, the study uses Glassdoor and Brandwatch, which are both internationally utilized platforms. Recognizing this, further research is required to

identify national or cultural variations. For example, by conducting an empirical study contrasting different data sets to determine the cultural and international applicability of the findings, for instance comparing with other international platforms such as workopolis. com and Indeed.com and/or more targeted platforms such as jobadviser.com.au (Australia), ratemyem-ployer.ca (Canada), Kununu.com (the German-speaking market).

Finally, we recognize that the use of social media and other Web2.0 platforms is still gaining in maturity, especially in the B-to-B marketplace. With this comes learning of how to leverage online engagement effectively for both customers and employees. Therefore, the findings of this study may not be fixed and future research could look at how brand personalities change over time, especially as companies gain expertise in social media use. This research could assist companies in determining what inputs, such as firm behaviour or online messaging, could cause a change in how the employee would perceive the brand personality. Future research could also examine how particular keywords or phrases, when used as search terms by prospective employees, generate brand perceptions in order to attract employees with similar attitudes and values as the employer. Overall, we recognize the multidimensionality of brand personality formation and note that this research could be helpful in spearheading corrective action when the brand personality as perceived by customers, current and future employees, and top management do not align.

Conclusion

This study has provided insights with regard to stakeholder brand engagement by exploring how employees of B-to-B firms engage with their employer brand on the social media platform, Glassdoor. By analyzing employee reviews on this platform, we uncover firm-specific brand person-alities based on Aaker's (1997) dimensions, as constructed according to what employees were saying about their employer brand online. We found that there were significant differences between the brand personalities of top rated B-to-B brands and bottom rated B-to-B brands and these findings are also consistent between

high-rated and low-rated employers. An important finding was that a strong online or social media presence does not necessarily indicate a strong employer brand, as high-ranking firms were found to be less competent, exciting, rugged, and sincere compared to low-ranking firms. Overall, there is still a great deal of research that needs to be done to explore how employees are shaping employer brands online. A number of practical implications stem from continued work in this area and help managers to better understand their employees who are important stakeholders when it comes to creating and maintaining a brand image, especially in the online engagement space.

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