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The Brand Coolness perception through Brand Communities

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THE BRAND COOLNESS PERCEPTION THROUGH BRAND COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

The study of Brand Coolness is a recent topic at the academy and there's not much information of the implications of it at the Brand Equity and how this can be used to engage the customers. Because of the pandemic, people have migrated to the online environment and their experiences with brands could be shared through the brand communities available.

Addressing these gaps, this research, with a Netnography approach, aims to study two online brand communities of retail brands. The brands analysed are from home and furniture retail and grocery retail.

The analysis could reveal that the brand communities can influence the Brand Coolness perception, but it will vary for each brand. Furthermore, it identified that there's still some dimensions that need to be added at the Brand Coolness scale. It is concluded with academical and managerial implications.

Keywords: Brand Coolness, Brand Community, Netnography, Online, Retail

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1. Introduction

What are the details that make the difference for a customer when they need to decide which brand to buy? The perception of the brand generates an important impact in the customer decision and, consequently, in the final sales.

Customers are constantly bombarded with information, advertising, news, etc, which helps to generate the perception of a brand in their minds: if that brand fits in a specific niche, if the customer wants to be related to that brand, if that brand is trustable, etc. According to the 2022 Global Marketing Trends (Deloitte, 2022), customers – especially the young generations – are most willing to shop more when the brand creates a coherent message and image that aligns with the values they live by.

The brand coolness study comes in the scenario mentioned above. Marketers always try to make or create cool brands, because they know that being uncool can sink even the most popular or well-funded brand (Warren *et al*, 2019). This is a concept that has been studied for a relatively short amount of time, so for the Academy and Companies it is a blurred path to follow since there is not enough literature that offers valuable meaning on what features characterise a cool brand (Warren *et al.*, 2019).

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, people had to stay home and with that, the online environment was a way of having a normal life. According to Statista, in 2020, 37% of the internet users in the U.S., claimed to have increased their spending from online marketplaces and this is an example of how the online environment became more important in the past two years.

So far, there is no study that connects any online customer behavior with the brand coolness. Previous studies about brand coolness have addressed the relationship between the concept with the museums (Loureiro & Blanco, 2021) and with hotel brands (Chen *et al.,* 2021), but considering the scenario we are living since 2020, there's a gap at the academy to understand how the online environment can affect the brand coolness concept.

That being said, this study attempts to fill this gap by exploring and understanding the importance of the brand coolness dimension among the retail experience and how the online environment can affect the customer perception of this new concept.

In a world even more connected, the perception of brand coolness can be related to the brand communities and that is the purpose of this study, to show how the perception of brand coolness can be affected through the brand communities. So, the investigation aims to answer the following research questions: Can online brand communities affect the brand coolness perception of a brand? Can brand communities be used to change the perception of coolness of a brand?

Brand communities are great environments to increase customer loyalty (McAlexander *et al.*, 2002); they can be used as platforms to advertise, share information, socialise, create bonds, customer support among other resources that will facilitate the understanding of consumer behaviour. (Habibi *et al*, 2014).

Through this study, the concepts of Brand Coolness and Brand Communities were explored and after were analysed and verified if both concepts are in some way connected and if one affects the other.

This study adds to the existing literature review on how brand communities grew at the period analysed, which gender affects the most the community and which brand coolness dimensions were the most found at the retailers analysed. Furthermore, this study also shows that there will be different reactions among customers based on the type of the retail studied (Lidl for food and grocery retail and IKEA for home and furniture retail) and consequently, different impacts at the brand coolness perception.

Moreover, this study has identified two new possible dimensions (or subdimensions) to the brand coolness scale, in that way expanding the scale proposed by Warren *et al.* (2019). On the other hand, for a more practical implication, the study is relevant to deliver important data of consumer behavior for retailers and marketeers, where they can expand their knowledge and vision of how to work more effectively with the brand communities to achieve better results at the good perception of the brand among customers.

To be able to achieve the purpose of this study, a Netnography approach was performed at the research. Specifically, it was conducted in two online brand communities at the retail sector that were previously mentioned: IKEA and Lidl brands.

The study starts at the section 1, with an introduction about what the reader can expect in this study. The subsequent section 2, presents the literature review, where the concepts will be presented.

The rest of the research is structured as follows. In section 3, the reader can find a description of the research approach used. Afterwards, in section 4 the data analysis will be presented. The section 5 addresses the results and discussion. Finally, the section 6 will show the research implications to the academy and management, followed by the limitations of this research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social Media

The online environment is not a new subject of study and for marketers, social media is a very important channel to understand the consumers. Social media is so popular that it is expected a growth in the popularity as a complaint outlet for the younger generations (Golmohammadi *et al.*, 2021). Nowadays, social media is used as a platform where the companies can have a positive impact on word of mouth (WOM) and increase the consumers' purchase intentions (Hogreve *et al.*, 2019).

Social Media also increased the conversations about brands among consumers (Rust *et al*, 2021). Currently, it is crucial for brands to listen how they are being commented on online, since those comments come from people that care about the brand and several important inputs can be obtained (Rust *et al.*, 2021).

2.2. Brand Community

In older times, community was a limited concept that was restricted to the people that were physically close to you as for family, neighbours, etc. However, with the development of new ways of communication, this limitation is no longer an issue and people are able to connect themselves to whoever they like and wherever they are.

The idea and concept of Brand Community was developed to help brands understand two phenomena: first, how to keep and create a closer relationship with while treating each person as an individual and, second, the difficulty nowadays that brands have in understanding the different ways of living, relationships and how the consumers choose to spend their money and time (Habibi *et al.*, 2014).

Brand community concept also helps to understand how and why the consumers build their brand loyalty, because through those communities it is possible to discover new ways of creation and reasons of brand loyalty (McAlexander *et al.*, 2002).

So, with that in mind, nowadays the brands recognize the importance and relevance of these communities to know and retain consumers, showing a growing interest in maintenance, monitoring the interaction and in the creation of platforms that can support those communities. Through them, the brands can reach new inputs for products or services, improve their relationship and communication without spending much money compared with the traditional marketing.

The idea of consumer communities is not new and it has been studied for a while. The consumption pattern of communities happens through food, drinks, gifts, cultural traditions, celebrations, rituals, to try to fit into a new community, etc (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). The ways of creation and how they interact are some of the points that changed with the appearance and rise of the internet, more specifically, with social media. We can define the brand community as a specialised community, not connected geographically but linked through social relations of fans of a brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

In general, brand communities perform important functions in brand representation, since they share information, customer care, and in return, the brand receives trustable and exclusive information that helps understand the consumer behaviour (Habibi *et al.*, 2014).

A brand community has at least three key indicators or components that make it recognized as a community: consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions and sense of moral responsibility (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

The consciousness of kind can be represented in a feeling that connects all the members of the same brand community, generating a sense of belonging and connection among the members in contrast to the non-members – "us against the others" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). The second indicator is the rituals and traditions. They preserve and share the community's history, culture and consciousness (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). The last indicator is the sense of moral responsibility, which is the one that refers to the sense of commitment of the members of that community to the welfare of the other members and the community itself (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Despite the traditional ways of describing a community, there is another perspective about the brand community: the customer-centric. It means that the existence and reasons for that community is based on the customer experience instead of only based on the brand.

(McAlexander *et al.*, 2002). For the customer-centric perspective, different dimensions or indicators are considered, such as geographic concentration, social context, and temporality. (McAlexander *et al.*, 2002).

The geographic concentration is a dimension that says that even though brand communities are not defined as geographically linked, they can be geographically concentrated or scattered, and can even exist in a non-geographic place like the internet. (McAlexander *et al.*, 2002). The other dimension mentioned by McAlexander *et al.* (2002) for the brand communities, was social context. The communities can have a strong bond among the members, where they share great deal of information about each other (sex, age, personal life, etc.), or not. (McAlexander *et al.*, 2002). The temporality dimension can be stable or enduring and the temporal stability of a community can be an asset to marketers (McAlexander *et al.*, 2002).

Nowadays, the communities are very popular among brands. At least half of the top 100 global brands selected by Interbrand in 2011, already hosted their own online community (Manchanda *et al.*, 2015). Global brands such as Sephora (Beauty Insider Community), Apple (Apple Support Community) and LEGO (LEGO Ideas - Community), are very successful examples of how to manage brand communities.

The online brand communities are no longer only platforms to brand-related messages, they are space to user-generated content, ideas, among other topics (Chi *et al.*, 2021). They became a marketing channel to brand-to-customer (B2C) and customer-to-customer (C2C) engagement, and it is becoming more used by the brands as a service channel. (Chi *et al.*, 2021).

2.2.1. Reasons For Joining Brand Communities

Brand communities as mentioned before, are platforms where consumers can share information and knowledge. To better explain the reasons for joining brand communities, it is important to remember the concept of hedonic value.

Hedonic value is described as related to fun and positive feelings that consumers get from a shopping experience (El-Adly & Eid, 2016). And also, it can be found through an emotional and novelty value (Li *et al.*, 2021).

Participating in a brand community can make the consumer experience a hedonic way of consumption (Schau *et al.*, 2009). When consumers participate in the creation or feel that they are part of that brand, it increases the feeling of integration in that particular brand community which leads to a more positive feeling about the brand and even about the product category (Schau et al., 2009). The online participation of consumers in the creation or design of products can increase the willingness to pay or even to pay more for that item (Schau *et al.*, 2009).

Joining a brand community can fulfill the need of consumers to be identified with symbols and groups (Habibi *et al.*, 2014). It also helps the consumers feel a sense of belonging and they can share their passion with others that will understand them (Zaglia, 2013).

Consumers can build a stronger relationship with a brand and their motivations can represent a future behaviour in that particular brand community (Habibi *et al.*, 2014).

2.3. Consumer-Brand Relationship

Consumers that have a strong bond with brands are important to the strategy of the company. The consumer-brand relationship (CBR) comes in this scenario as a powerful mechanism (Khamitov *et al.*, 2019).

With the advance of CBR studies, the understanding of its structure could be identified and organised thought and action of for example: brand love, brand attachment, commercial friendships, among others (Alvarez *et al*, 2021).

The brand relationships are very important commercial assets since they are able to be converted to economic profit and therefore it is a good strategy for the brand to pursue stronger relationships (Connors *et al.*, 2020).

2.4. Brand Coolness

There's an important point that helps the buying decision process: is your brand cooler than the competitor's?

When consumers have to choose between two different brands with similar products, the one that has more chances to be chosen is the one they believe will be more accepted by their community or the brand that is "hot" at that moment.

Nowadays, brands are doing several collaborations to become "cooler" or to increase the perception of coolness. Throughout recent times, various brands have benefited from the consumer perception of coolness, such as Nike, Marlboro, Abercrombie and Fitch, Apple, among others are good examples of cool or ex-cool brands.

The term cool does not have a consensus about its definition. According to the dictionary Merriam-Webster (2021), the informal use of the word cool, means: very good, excellent, all right, fashionable and hip. However, there is not an ultimate definition of the term and there are many ways of explaining it.

Warren and Campbell (2014) defined four properties to explain coolness. The first is that coolness is socially constructed. An object does not become cool at its creation but it becomes cool when the perception of the audience considers it so. The second point is coolness being considered subjective and dynamic. The perception of what is cool among the consumers changes over time and across consumers. Third, coolness is perceived to be a positive quality and consumers use the word "cool" to express that they liked something (Belk *et al.*, 2010). The last property says that even though coolness is considered a positive feature, it requires more than this perception: it needs to deliver more than the positive or desirable feeling.

Since the coolness can be understood differently because it is socially constructed, it will vary according to generations (Chen *et al.*, 2021). Gen Z has a different perception of what is cool when compared with the Baby Boomer generation. And the Baby Boomer's can be considered having the most different perception since they are the generation that was less affected by the current technology (internet and social media), when growing up (Chen *et al.*, 2021).

The cool brands are perceived as popular, authentical, original, rebellious, having an appealing aesthetic, energetic and iconic (Warren *et al.*, 2019). Normally, the first glimpse to become a cool brand, appears in small subcultures, and those brands can be referred to as niche cool because are perceived cool only for a small group (Warren *et al.*, 2019). However,

it can be only a start to the brand coolness perception of those niche cool brands, since every time they get more attention and its audience grows, the brand is transformed into mass cool and they are perceived more popular but less autonomous (Warren *et al.*, 2019).

The concept of coolness can help brands grow and remain in rank of the most popular brands (ex: Apple) or can sink brands transforming them into uncool brands (ex: Von Dutch) (Loureiro & Blanco, 2021). A scale was developed to measure and to distinguish the cool from uncool brands (Warren *et al.,* 2019). The scale is composed of ten dimensions: useful/extraordinary, aesthetically appealing, energetic, high status, original, authentic, rebellious, subcultural, iconic, and popular. Some dimensions can be more important than others depending on the context in which the brand is found (Loureiro & Blanco, 2021).

The research to get to the topic of brand coolness started first with the investigation of the coolness term. It is possible to find research about personality traits associated with cool people, cool technologies, and how specific factors and novelties can influence the perception of coolness (Warren *et al.*, 2019). However, until 2019 there was no specific research about a way of identifying the characteristics that can be associated with cool brands. The research of Warren *et al.* (2019), as mentioned before, created a scale to measure those characteristics. After the creation of this scale, the research about Brand Coolness could be studied as a subject differently from the coolness used as a term. In most recent research, the Brand Coolness was linked to Luxury fashion brands (Loureiro & Blanco, 2021).

Furthermore, Brand coolness is becoming an important way to understand the consumers in order to give them what they want, and also a way of maintaining the brand sustainably and keeping it alive through time. In the last 2 years, with the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, the consumers had to migrate from offline to online shopping, and in this scenario brand communities, that are tools to connect the consumers, could help them discuss the brand itself, which can contribute to create or change the brand coolness perception.

2.4.1. Brand Coolness Dimensions

As mentioned before, in 2019 a way to measure Brand Coolness was created. The ten dimensions are the specific characteristics that consumers seek to define a cool brand.

First dimension is Useful/Extraordinary. That means that consumers perceive cool brands as being of high quality, offering good customer service or any type of tangible benefit, but it also can have an extraordinary effect (Warren *et al.*, 2019).

Second dimension is Aesthetically Appealing. Having a great, elegant design grabs the attention of the consumers which increases the perception of coolness (Warren *et al.*, 2019).

Third dimension is Energetic. Brands that are associated with words such as youthful, active or even energetic. This dimension can even be associated with hedonism and excitement (Warren *et al.*, 2019).

Fourth dimension is High Status. Consumers perceive it as a cool brand, the ones that are associated with glamour, upper and sophisticated classes (Warren *et al.*, 2019). This fits for the luxury brands.

Fifth dimension is Original. Brands that can be at the vanguard of its industry, always thinking outside of the box are considered cool to the consumers (Warren *et al.*, 2019).

Sixth dimension is Authentic. That was the most common word associated with cool brands among consumers. Brands don't need to try to be cool, they just are (Warren *et al.*, 2019).

Seventh dimension is Rebellious. Being cool was always related to rebellion and there are several brands considered cool that use this "rebellion" feeling to promote themselves (Warren *et al.*, 2019).

Eighth dimension is Subcultural. As previously mentioned, cool brands can be associated with subcultures (Warren *et al.*, 2019).

Ninth dimension is Iconic. Brands can hold a very special meaning for consumers, related to cultural traits, memories, relationships and so becoming an icon (Warren *et al.,* 2019).

Tenth dimension is Popular. Brands can start out as cool for a specific subculture and then become popular, that is the transition known as niche cool to mass cool (Warren *et al.*, 2019).

3. Research Methodology

The following chapter addresses the research issue and question, the methodology approach that will be used and how the data will be analysed. The section 3.1 contains the research issue and question. After, section 3.2 provides an explanation of the approach taken to do the research.

3.1. Research Issue and Questions

In accordance with the literature review, the main subject that will be studied (Brand coolness) is a recent topic at the academy so that is why the subject has its literature starting in 2019 with the article named Brand Coolness (Warren *et al.*, 2019). It is a new concept with a large field to be developed.

This document will study how Brand Coolness can be perceived through the Brand Communities. The Brand Community topic is also relevant and with the rise of social media, became even more popular among the brands (Manchanda *et al.*, 2015).

There is a gap in this study of how brand communities can influence and change the perception of the "coolness" for the consumers. The use of communities can be a booster to brands and help them look cooler or if there is no particular relation and the community is only a platform to interact with the consumer. So, the question to be answered in this investigation is: Can Brand Communities be used to change the perception of coolness of a brand?

3.2. Research Approach

Considering the research problem, the research approach that will be used in this study to do the analysis will be the Netnography.

Netnography is a qualitative method that is used to study online communities and consumer motivations and behaviour (Bartl, Kannan, & Stockinger, 2016). This method is performed entirely online since it is an Internet-based qualitative research method (Xharavina *et al.*, 2019).

It is considered a popular research method, and in the past 20 years it has gained strength and became an important way to analyze the online communities (Xharavina *et al.*, 2019). Since the interest in understanding the impacts of those online communities had increased recently, scholars noticed the potential that online communities have, and they are using Netnography as a method to analyze and understand the way the consumer behaves in the online environment (Xharavina *et al.*, 2019). The online interactions no longer can be ignored since there are rules and rituals that influence the consumption and buying behaviours (La Rocca *et al.*, 2014).

Netnography is similar to traditional Ethnography, being a naturalistic, interpretive and flexible method. However, it is faster, cheaper and simpler (Kozinets, R.V., 2006). This method, still anonymous, text-based, presents ethical issues, it leaves a superficial and decontextualized interpretation and considerable perceptiveness from the researcher (Kozinets, R.V., 2006).

Since this study will analyse the perception of Brand Coolness among the Brand Communities, the Netnography method is the most suitable since the communities are mostly found online: on social media such as Facebook, Reddit or even the brand's website. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the presence of consumers online has grown, and e-commerce has become a very important subject in the academy. The number of publications about e-commerce in 2020 almost tripled when compared to 2000 and it increased 1.4 times through the last year (Gu *et al.*, 2021).

With the growth of e-commerce and the inability of people shopping in normal retail stores, the brands have to adapt themselves to understand and generate a strategy to create a better perception of the online environment. In conclusion, the Netnography fits this study perfectly, because of the growth of online shopping due to COVID-19 pandemic, brand communities are stronger online (social media) and the intention is to perceive the consumers behavior related to a brand.

4. Data Analysis

This study will analyse two worldwide brands: IKEA and Lidl. It is expected to analyse the interaction of consumers in the communities of those brands from 2018 until the present day. These communities are open and are not inside any social media, which will make the process of access and extraction of data easier. This data will then be analysed according to the Brand Coolness scale, created by Warren *et al.* (2019) in face of the inputs collected inside those communities.

4.1. Description of the Data

For this study and using the Netnography approach, the data analysed was mainly found on social media, specifically on Facebook.

Facebook is one of the most popular social medias across the world, according to Statista (2022) the number of active users in the last quarter of 2021 was 2.912 million. Besides that, it is considered a platform where customers can talk directly with other customers and with the brand itself.

The data collected is from 2018 until present days for IKEA and Lidl companies and it was collected simultaneously since it was important to verify if in there would be different reactions for different retailers. For the data analyses, the Brand Coolness Dimensions were used versus the comments that were found on the Facebook pages of the companies.

These two studies, in particular, covered posts from consumers who shared their opinion and feedback, as mentioned previously, at the Facebook community of IKEA and Lidl. After collecting the data manually, at the Facebook community page, all posts were carefully examined and selected, letting only the relevant ones being considered.

The analysis was based on the Brand Coolness Dimensions and to simplify the research, it was numbered from 1 to 10, represented in this table below:

Table 1

Brand Coolness Dimensions

Brand Coolness Dimensions	
1	Useful/Extraordinary
2	Aesthetically Appealing
3	Energetic
4	High Status
5	Original
6	Authentic
7	Rebellious
8	Subcultural
9	Iconic
10	Popular

4.2. Study 1 (Lidl)

Lidl was chosen because it is one of the most valuable and known retail companies, that offers quality products with low prices (LIDL, 2022). It was founded in 1973, in Ludwigshafen, Germany. Nowadays, Lidl operates in 32 countries, has around 11,200 stores and employs more 310.000 people globally (LIDL, 2022).

On Facebook, Lidl Portugal, has more than 1.1 million likes and followers in their community, being the second most important Facebook community among the supermarkets that operate in Portugal.

Additionally, Lidl has important marketing elements in its website and campaigns that provides a great customer experience, and this is one of the strategic points that makes the customers keep coming back (MARKETING WEEK, 2019).

4.2.1. Mainly Dimensions Perceived (Lidl)

The first data analysed by Lidl, starts from March of 2018 and finishes in April of 2020. This period can be considered the pre-pandemic scenario in this study.

In that period, more than 200 users' comments were analysed on Lidl's Facebook page. At that point, it was possible to find some of the brand coolness dimensions that were explained above.

Table 2

Brand Coolness Dimensions Found on Lidl's Facebook Community - 2018 to 2020

Brand Coolness Dimensions Found on Lidl's Facebook Community - 2018 to 2020	
Useful Extraordinary	16
Aesthetically Appealing	9
Iconic	45
Popular	34
Total	**104**

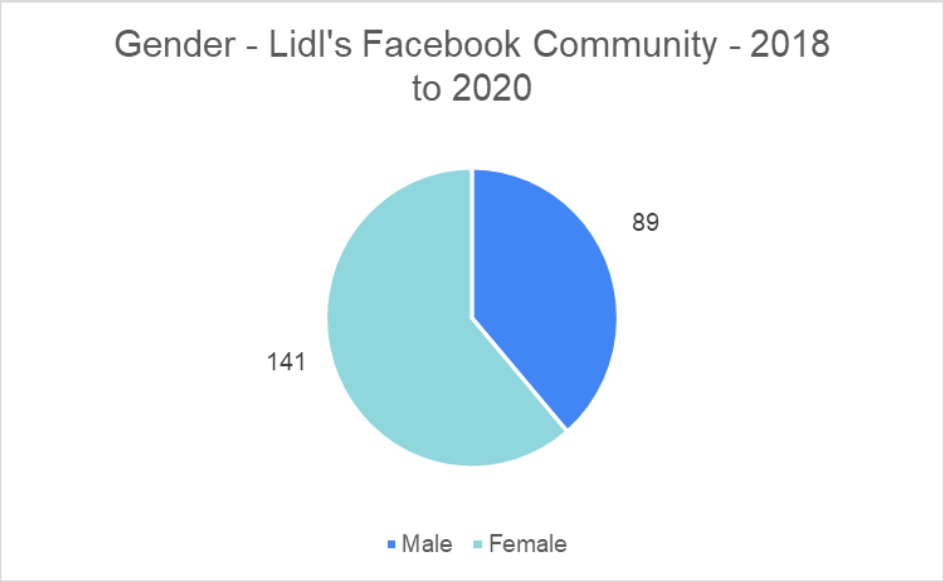
At this point, by analysing the Table 2, we can verify that half of the comments could be related with at least one of the dimensions. But it is important to see that only 4 of 10 dimensions were reached and found at the open community for Lidl on Facebook. For every

brand the customer perception will change and that happens because of the image this brand has built through the years and that is one of the reasons why only some of the dimensions are perceived and not all of them.

In this first period of analysis, it was possible to verify around 230 comments on Lidl's Facebook Community, being 141 (61%) Female and 89 (39%) Male as it can be seen by the Figure 1. With that we can conclude that even if we only found the brand coolness dimension in 104 comments, the most engaged gender is the female. They left their opinion in almost 2/3 of the comments and for this period of time we can consider that females were the most responsible for increasing the brand coolness perception for anyone that searched or entered on Lidl's Facebook Community.

Figure 1

Gender - Lidl's Facebook Community - 2018 to 2020



This can be related with the type of communication Lidl's has been doing and also with the type of society we are inserted into, being the female responsible for the grocery shopping in most Portuguese homes.

For 2021, considering the new wave of COVID-19, the posts have had a boost since many bloggers started to share recipes, opinions about the products, etc. This can be seen later at the gender analysis of 2021.

By analysing the Table 3, it is possible to see and generate a comparison in the growth of the user's participation at the Lidl's Facebook Community with the previous years. In 2021, Lidl had 280 posts that could improve the brand coolness perception among the consumer and compared with the first period analysed, there was a growth of 169%.

The dimension mostly found was Useful/Extraordinary, which is a change in the user's behaviour, when compared to the first period that the Popular dimension was the most found.

Table 3

Brand Coolness Dimensions Found on Lidl's Facebook Community – 2021

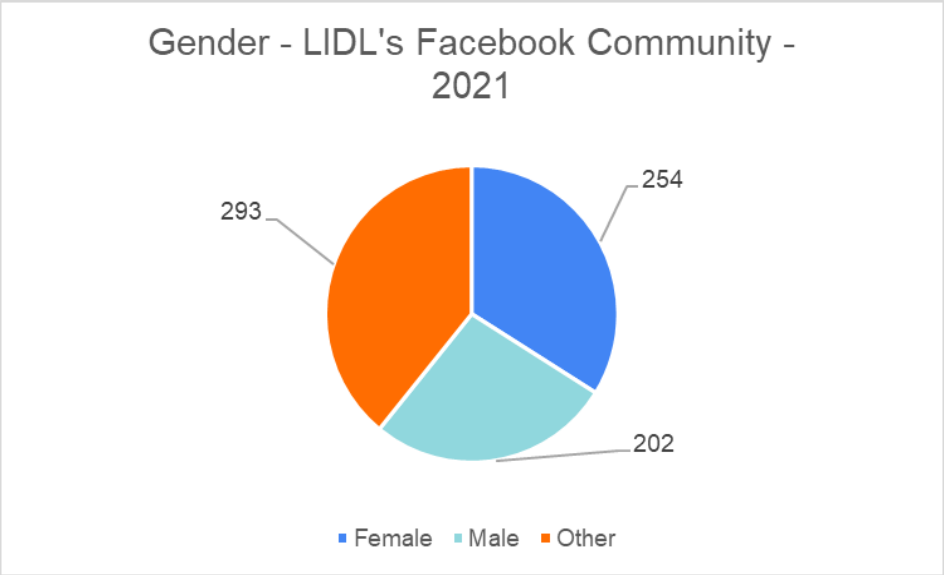
Brand Coolness Dimensions Found on Lidl's Facebook Community – 2021	
Useful Extraordinary	112
Aesthetically Appealing	3
Energetic	33
High Status	8
Authentic	20
Rebellious	11
Iconic	30
Popular	63
Total	**280**

Focusing on the gender for the year of 2021, there is the growth of "Other". For "Other", were considered pages from companies, bloggers, influencers, reviews, among others.

For this year 749 posts were analysed, the Others representing 39% of this total as can be seen by the Figure 2. The Female is the second most important group with 254 posts (34%), followed by Male with 202 posts (27%).

Figure 2

Gender - Lidl's Facebook Community – 2021



The year of 2022, started with a better economic scenario. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Portugal had several restrictions that were removed.

For the customers of Lidl, the perception of brand coolness expanded from January until the middle of May. Several different Brand Coolness dimensions could be found in this new post-pandemic scenario, 9 out of 10 to be exact. The Table 4 shows which dimensions were perceived in 2022:

Table 4

Brand Coolness Dimensions Found on Lidl's Facebook Community – 2022

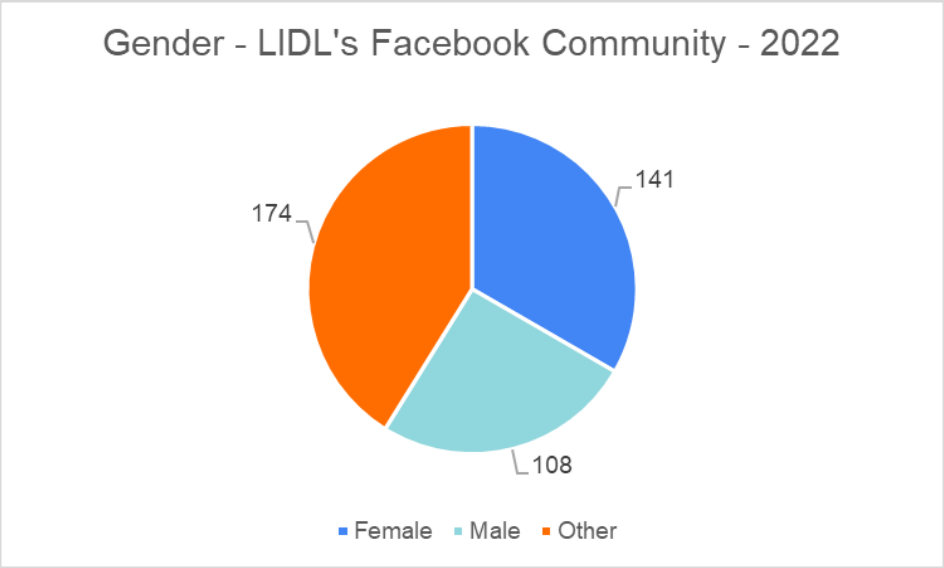
Brand Coolness Dimensions Found on Lidl's Facebook Community – 2022	
Useful Extraordinary	44
Aesthetically Appealing	2
Energetic	28
High Status	1
Original	9
Authentic	10
Rebellious	2
Iconic	8
Popular	34
Total	**138**

By looking at the Figure 3, it's possible to see that from a total of 423 posts analysed in Lidl's Facebook community, 138 were found to have characteristics of brand coolness. The percentage is around 33%, which means that 1/3 of the posts from 2022 could elevate the perception in a good way and were positive for Lidl's brand.

About gender, from the 423 posts, the others were responsible for 41% of the publications in the community. Females are the second most popular group with 141 posts (33%) and Males are in the last position with 108 posts (26%).

Figure 3

Gender - Lidl's Facebook Community – 2022



4.3. Study 2 (IKEA)

IKEA, is a Swedish company founded in 1943 and its name comes from the initials of its founder: Ingvar Kamprad and from the farm he lived in (Elmtaryd) and the local parish (Agunnaryd) (IKEA, 2022).

The IKEA group is a global retail brand that is present in more than 50 markets worldwide with a total of 422 stores globally in 2018 (IKEA, 2022). In the year of 2021, they were considered the 27th best global brand, with a brand value of 20 billion dollars (INTER-BRAND, 2022).

Furthermore, IKEA has a strong and well consolidated community and loyal customers. On Facebook, the official page has more than 31 million likes and followers. Also, they have their own community where customers can share opinions, check the announcements of IKEA, the most popular products among customers, etc.

4.3.1. Mainly Dimensions Perceived (IKEA)

The analysis of IKEA starts in the pre-pandemic scenario as mentioned in Lidl's analysis. The first analysis has its period in January of 2018 and finishes in March of 2020.

For IKEA, the period of 2018 until 2020 was analysed in 101 posts, where in 50% of it was possible to identify some brand coolness dimension.

Table 5

Brand Coolness Dimensions Found on IKEA's Facebook Community - 2018 to 2020

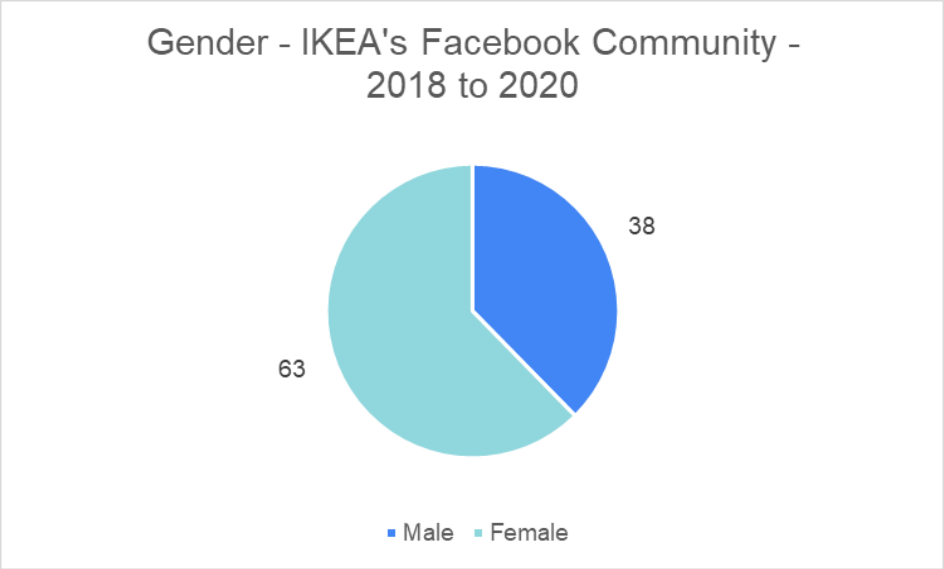
Brand Coolness Dimensions Found on IKEA's Facebook Community - 2018 to 2020	
Useful Extraordinary	9
Aesthetically Appealing	11
Iconic	14
Popular	9
Original	4
Authentic	4
Total	**51**

For IKEA there are less comments when compared with Lidl's, but it is possible to verify more brand coolness dimensions for IKEA (6 of 10). The type of business changed and IKEA products can be perceived in a different way and that is one of the reasons for the appearance of more dimensions of brand coolness.

The gender difference mostly found on IKEA's Facebook community from the 101 posts present from 2018 to 2020 shows that 63 (62%) are from females and 38 (38%) are from males.

Figure 4

Gender IKEA's Facebook Community - 2018 to 2020



Even though the dimensions were only found in 51 comments, the gender analysis represents the importance of the females in that community, and we can consider them (the same happened to Lidl's) the influencers on the increase of the perception of brand coolness dimensions there, considering that specific period of time.

For the rest of the year of 2020 (April until December), there were a total of 463 posts on IKEA's Facebook Community. From those only 46 posts had some Brand Coolness dimension, where it was possible to find posts that could fit in the Rebellious dimension, and it was the only time this dimension was found through the entire analysis.

The Table 6 shows the Brand Coolness Dimensions found in IKEA's Facebook Community since April to December of 2020. This time, it was possible to find more dimensions than in the last period analysed (7 of the 10).

Table 6

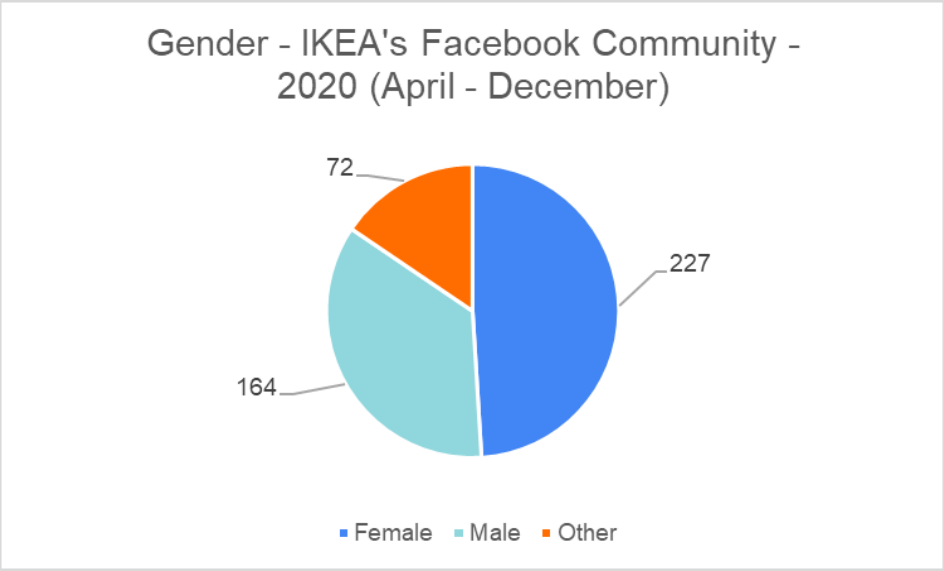
Brand Coolness Dimensions Found on IKEA's Facebook Community – 2020

Brand Coolness Dimensions Found on IKEA's Facebook Community - 2020 (April - December)	
Useful Extraordinary	28
Aesthetically Appealing	10
Original	4
Iconic	6
Popular	20
Authentic	5
Rebellious	1
Total	**46**

In gender analysis, there weren't many changes, Females continued to be responsible for most of the posts on that page, where 227 were Female, 164 Male and 72 "Other" as can be seen in the Figure 5.

Figure 5

Gender - IKEA's Facebook Community – 2020



At the Facebook IKEA's community, the year of 2021 started with the COVID-19 new wave and with a new lockdown in Europe. And even after an entire year in this pandemic scenario, analysing the community, the users at that time used the platform to complain of bad delivery services.

Since they were locked in their houses, e-commerce was the main way customers found to do shopping, but it had many issues mainly from January to April of 2021 (period of full restrictions in Portugal). So, when the data was collected, it is possible to see that talking about the brand was not an important matter but complaining about the services was much more important at that time.

In the year 2021, 345 posts were found on IKEA's Facebook community, and the period with more customer interaction was from January and April, what we can connect with the lockdown in Europe at that time, as was already said.

Unfortunately, most of the comments were related to issues people had with IKEA services through the lockdown and this affected the good interaction, compliments that IKEA could have received at that time.

Only 31 positive comments/posts were found on IKEA's Facebook community in the year of 2021. This corresponds to 9% of the total comments in that year. The Difference dimension found was Energetic, instead of Authentic, as it can be seen by the Table 7.

Table 7

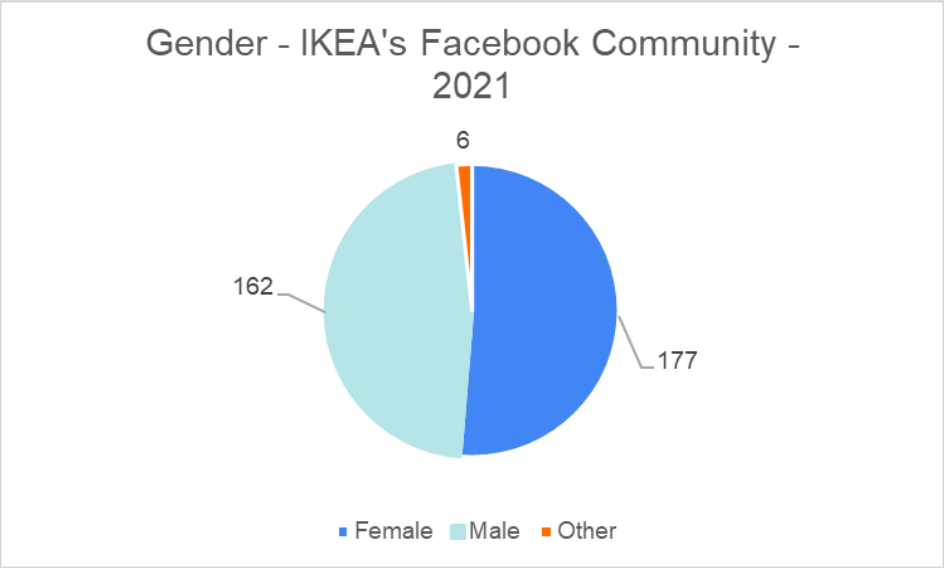
Brand Coolness Dimensions Found on IKEA's Facebook Community – 2021

Brand Coolness Dimensions Found on IKEA's Facebook Community – 2021	
Useful Extraordinary	6
Aesthetically Appealing	4
Iconic	6
Popular	9
Original	4
Energetic	1
Total	**31**

Looking at the Figure 6, we can verify that the gender that had more interaction during the year of 2021 was Female, which continued being the most active users and the most responsible for posts and comments on IKEA's page. However, the difference is smaller when compared to the same period in the previous year (2020), where women represented 51% (177 posts/comments), men represent 47% (162 posts/comments) and "Other" represent 2% (6 posts/comments), as you can see in figure 5.

Figure 6

Gender - IKEA's Facebook Community – 2021



In 2022, the situation is much more like the pre-pandemic times since the restrictions are almost completely gone and life is starting to get back to what it was before COVID-19. For the data of 2022, the months analysed were from January to the middle of May.

For this year, it was only possible to analyse a part of the year, so that's the main reason for the smaller number of posts in IKEA's Facebook community. In 2022 so far, the community has had 80 posts, and only 11 could fit the brand coolness dimension.

Table 8 demonstrates the Brand Coolness Dimensions found on IKEA's Facebook Community for 2022.

Table 8

Brand Coolness Dimensions Found on IKEA's Facebook Community – 2022

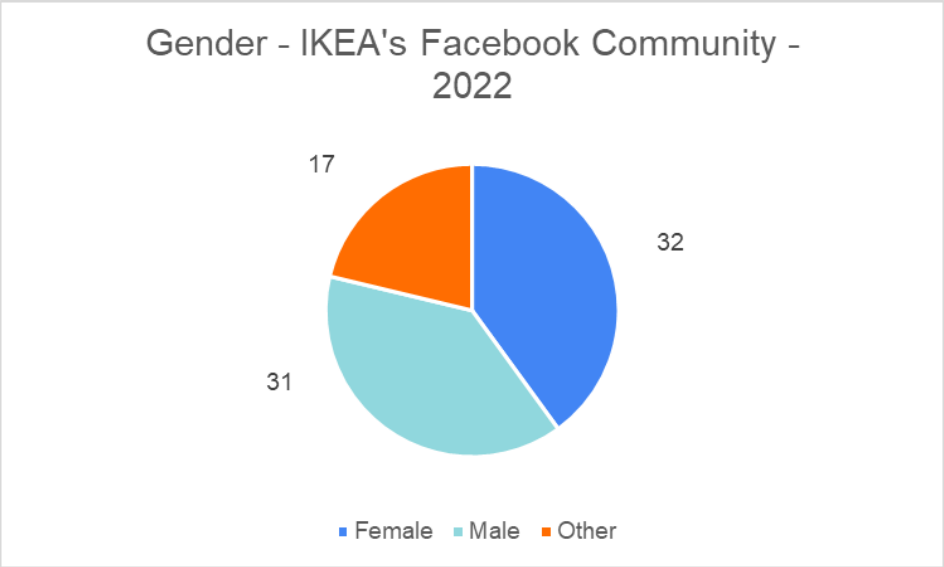
Brand Coolness Dimensions Found on IKEA's Facebook Community – 2022	
Useful Extraordinary	3

Aesthetically Appealing	2
Authentic	1
Rebellious	1
Iconic	1
Popular	3
Total	**11**

Regarding gender, Figure 7 shows that in 2022 the percentage is getting closer between Male and Female. For the total of 80 posts, 31 (38.75%) are from men, 32 (40%) from women and 17 (21.25%) from "Other".

Figure 7

Gender - IKEA's Facebook Community - 2022



5. Results and Discussion

The data was saved in a Microsoft Excel sheet, so it would facilitate the access of it. Also, the data was saved in its original language but for the study was translated to English language and to ensure the user's anonymity, a code was designed to every post copied and saved.

5.1. Results

To be able to answer the question for both studies, if the online communities can influence in the brand coolness perception among the consumers, it is important to clarify the business type of each company and what it is expected from them. It is necessary to remind that some posts could fit in more than one dimensions of the brand coolness scale.

Study 1

Lidl's is a supermarket, so the customer can expect to find good products with a fair price. The range of the products is also important, that means that customers will be able to find products from a specific brand to a white label brand. The customer does not expect great service, because this is not the purpose of a supermarket, and the consumption of those goods will be in a short period of time (food has an expiration date).

Regarding this study, it can be concluded that the community on Facebook has an influence on the brand's coolness perception. The community can increase the perception for the better and in several dimensions (Popular, Useful, Energetic…). Most posts were about how the brand could deliver a great customer experience, how they could improve their product offer or giving ideas of new locations for Lidl's supermarket to open a store. In general, the posts did not bring many negative comments.

Namely, the gender "others" is responsible for the most positive impact of Lidl's Facebook community. For "others", as already explained, were considered, companies, bloggers, influencers, reviews, among others. The "others" spread good information about the company. As an example, the same user, on the year of 2022 until the middle of May, posted about Lidl 82 times, and on those posts, it is possible to find good reviews, recipes using

products from the company, the latest news that customers can find, as illustrated in the following examples:

"I've already tried Lidl Portugal's Gold soluble coffee in vanilla quark (…). It's more than approved! Because it has larger grains, it needs more time to dissolve with the quark's moisture - I left it about 1 hour. If given time, it forms a really good creamy layer, thicker than those that form the finest soluble coffees (…) The flavor is excellent, quite intense!" (L1057, January 2022, Lidl)

"Cinnamon Queijada from Lidl Portugal (…) Who else can't resist temporary bakery items at Lidl? (…) I'm glad I couldn't resist, because they are well worth it (…)" (L1154, February 2022, Lidl)

"I discovered the formula for happiness, and it consists of sautéed potatoes with lemon pesto (…) I used a lemon pesto from Lidl Portugal, which appeared a few months ago in connection with the 'sicilia style' brochure. It has a super fresh and intense lemon flavor, which combines very well with the typical richness of pesto! The citrus aftertaste gives a certain freshness and lightness that are very welcome in a sauce rich in fat (…) And it leaves the kitchen smelling like an Italian restaurant. (…)" (L1196, March 2022, Lidl)

"Let's talk about Lidl Portugal's egg liqueur dessert (…) The most good thing (…) The flavor of the mousse is more intense than usual, and the texture is denser. The cup is small, but a real explosion (…) It combines very well with the velvety mousse." (L1394, May 2022, Lidl)

Another user that can be used as a good example for the impact of "others" in the brand's coolness perception, made Lidl posts that could fit the energetic dimension. Below there are a few posts from this user that illustrates it:

"Are you going to run or walk at Lidl S. Silvestre Cidade do Porto on March 13th? (…) Lidl Portugal" (L1117, February 2022, Lidl)

"Last entries for Lidl S. Silvestre do Porto (…)" (L1139, March 2022, Lidl)

"It's today at 19 pm!!! The departure of Lidl S. Silvestre Cidade do Porto is scheduled for 7pm on Av. of the Allies. Lidl Portugal." (L1227, March 2022, Lidl)

"We have news for the Braga Half Marathon. Lidl Portugal will be the Official Food Partner of this edition. As Lidl has already accustomed us to, athletes will be able to count on quality products to ensure their well-being during and after the race!" (L1265, March 2022, Lidl)

On the examples above, specific users were discussed, and below it is possible to find the examples of posts at the Lidl's Community, by the main brand coolness dimensions perceived:

Useful/Extraordinary:

This dimension represents 33% of the total of 522 posts that contains at least one dimension of brand coolness. This dimension can be illustrated as follows:

"Finally, the gentlemen from Lidl heard my prayers and finally put my favorite ice cream in XXL format (...)" (L368, June 2021, Lidl)

"Today I found light grated mozzarella cheese!! I missed Lidl!! Glad they continue to innovate with products that are needed!!! (…) Congratulations Lidl for all the excellent products they have on the market to offer their customers!!!" (L422, July 2021, Lidl)

""Thank you very much LIDL for fulfilling my request. In my Cartaxo store, finally, the fat that helps me to be a better gastronome!"!" (L1254, March 2022, Lidl)

Popular:

The Popular dimension represents 25% of the posts analyzed. Below is possible to see examples of those posts:

"Shopping bags are already waiting for the stores here in Madeira!" (L655, September 2021, Lidl)

"Love it" (L826, November 2021, Lidl)

"I consider myself a happy Lidl customer!" (L1155, February 2022, Lidl)

"Congratulations to Lidl, for keeping the doors closed on Easter day, so that your employees could spend this day with their families! 10 Stars!" (L066, April 2018, Lidl)

Iconic:

The third most important dimension found for Lidl, represents 16% of the total and can be illustrated by the following posts:

"Limited edition Lidl hoodie the only one in Portugal (...)" (L431, July 2021, Lidl)

"GENDER EQUALITY IS EDUCATED. Toys HAVE NO GENDER. It's still small steps, but it's good to see that it's already happening! Congratulations to Lidl Portugal" (L816, November 2021, Lidl)

"Congratulations Lidl Portugal for your bet on Madeira and start right now in the best way! Great communication!" (L850, November 2021, Lidl)

Continuing the analysis about gender, in the pre-pandemic environment, the most important gender was female and the use of the internet increased a lot during the pandemic due to the lockdown. The females are still important for a good impact of the brand coolness perception in 2022, the second most active group posted relatively little, as it has already been said.

Lidl's community, during the period of time analysed, could help the brand become the second most important among the competitors, being bigger and becoming cooler than Portuguese brands such as Pingo Doce.

Study 2

IKEA's is mainly a furniture store, and with that there's implications since the products are designed, produced and in many cases delivered by them. Also, when you buy a piece of furniture, you expect that it will last for some years, so the "expiration date" can be related with the product quality and the customer will relate the quality of the product with the price paid and then define the brand value.

Therefore, for this study it is possible to conclude that for the type of IKEA business, the Facebook community does not help to increase the coolness perception among the customers with the same intensity as it does for the Study 1.

Differently from Study 1, at the IKEA's community, the main comments made by Facebook users are complaints about the services or the quality of the products. As said previously, the type of business could and would impact the response of the customers and for IKEA, the community is used as a space for the customers to contact the company about an issue.

However, it was possible to find some brand coolness dimensions in the Facebook community. For the first period analysed, the Iconic and Popular dimensions were the most found but at the pandemic period of 2020, the useful/extraordinary dimension increased a lot, being the most responsible for the good comments and posts from users. Since then, this dimension is the most common followed by the Popular dimension.

Below there are some examples of the Iconic and Popular dimensions that were found before the pandemic period.

"Currently, we live because we are connected at all times. In the end, by disconnecting from the most important, from those around us and never failing us. Excellent IKEA campaign" (I003, December 2018, IKEA)

"This is what IKEA management in Sicily has decided! All abandoned patudinhos that want to enter to escape the cold will be well received and treated well! Images like these are heartwarming. The empathy and big heart of the whole team has already led some to be adopted! Definitely an example that would be praiseworthy to see in Portugal" (I006, November 2018, IKEA)

"Congratulations to IKEA staff !!! Credibility and trust !!" (I074, April 2019, IKEA)

"Today I was surprised by the positive with the IKEA warranty service. Thank you very much IKEA for your promptness in solving warranty problems in the kitchen. Fast service and 5 stars thank you very much." (I065, June 2019, IKEA)

Despite of the importance of this dimension for the first period analysed, for the other periods, the Useful/Extraordinary was the most common dimension as you can see illustrated below:

"Sometimes simple ideas are the best :) IKEA is helping those working at home" (I095, March 2020, IKEA)

"Thank IKEA do mar Shopping for the professionalism of the lost and found, which was fast and very effective." (I580, January 2021, IKEA)

"Me with IKEA giving tips on how to tidy the pantry! Take notes!" (I681, March 2021, IKEA)

"What a good idea. Congratulations to IKEA. May this idea multiply." (I984, May 2022, IKEA)

The dimensions mentioned above are the main brand coolness dimensions perceived through the posts at the community at Facebook. The Useful/Extraordinary dimension represents 28% and the Popular represents 25% from a total of 162 posts with some dimension perceived at the community.

The gender at this study, the "Females" were the biggest group among the whole period analysed and remain, even though the "males" did reduce the difference through time and the "others" increased their participation as well.

For IKEA's, the open community at Facebook, did not benefit the brand as much as it did for the brand at the Study 1. Being the services (delivery) the biggest responsible for the complaints at the period analysed, what can be considered one of the biggest impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic for many businesses, since all the logistics were overloaded, and people were impatiently locked at their houses.

Despite of the results for both studies, it is possible to verify that the ten brand coolness dimensions are not sufficient to explain positive comments or posts that can change the perception of coolness for the community users. The mainly new dimensions that are missing would be environmental and social sustainability.

5.2. Discussion

Considering our investigation, the concepts studied (Brand coolness and Brand community), had its literature review compared with the results explained above.

Accordingly, with McAlexander *et al.* (2002), the brand communities help the brand retain its customers and through this study, for both companies the online community environment was very important through the pandemic scenario and help the customers interacted with the brand.

This can be perceived with the expressive increase of participation in both communities. At the first period analysed for both brands (2018 to 2020), for Lidl's there was 230 posts and of IKEA there was 101. Yet in a shorter period analysed in 2022 (January to May), it's possible to verify that users are more active at the community. For Lidl in 2022 there was 423 posts and for IKEA 80 posts.

At the study 1, was possible to verify several users worried about the brand and with other users, when a false propaganda about a promotion was circulating through the internet:

"I found this post on Facebook, which appears to be a scam on behalf of Lidl. Perhaps it would be a good idea to investigate the publication. Compliments." (L955, December of 2021, Lidl)

This type of attitude reinforces the concept that brand communities generate a sense of belonging and moral responsibility with the community and its members (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Nevertheless, the same type of post or comments was not found on study 2 (IKEA's community) but that does not make one community less than the other. Specifically for the pandemic scenario analysed, the IKEA community was used as a tool where users could question or talk about the services of the brand and that is one of the new functions of brand communities (Chi *et al.*, 2021).

The other mainly subject studied, was the Brand Coolness. Both studies are from brands that are not appealing for the younger generations and the environment studied (internet) it is also a limitation to the coolness perception and that can be related with the concept of coolness, explained in the literature review, when was explained that coolness is a concept socially constructed and will vary according with the target or generation (Chen *et al.*, 2021). The brand of study 1, is a supermarket so it is possible to conclude that gen Z would not care much about the coolness perception of Lidl's since this generation is young and still dependent of their parents to choose and buy grocery products. The brand in study 2, it is mainly a furniture store and the same explanation of study 1 can be applied for study 2. Nevertheless, the academy does not explain the relation of gender versus influence of the coolness perception.

For both studies, the gender female and other, were the ones most responsible for increasing or maintaining the brand coolness perception among the users. This can be relevant to understand which types of brands can be more influenced by female, male or the other (influencers, bloggers…).

Several posts had more than one dimension but normally, as you can verify in the tables at both studies analysis, one of the dimensions was more important and constant through the

periods what just corroborates with the idea that some dimensions can be more important than other according with the context that the brand is found (Loureiro & Blanco, 2021).

Furthermore, the brand coolness dimension (Warren *et al.*, 2019), as was said previously need to be reviewed since the coolness is a concept socially created (Chen *et al.*, 2021), and the society changes so the trends also changes. Relevant topics can be created or modified and nowadays two topics are very important and the brands are investing on it: environmental and social sustainability. At the academy, would be important to have a study to update this scale since the world as we know suffered a big change in the past 2 years, but this does not mean that the scale is wrong or invalid.

6. Implications

The study of brand coolness is a recent topic at the academy and still has many fields to be understood. In this study, the main goal was to verify if open communities could generate a perceptive and positive impact on the perception of coolness to the customers that participate in that community. Also, if the posts and comments would affect the brand image in the end.

6.1. Theoretical Implications

These results offer important theoretical implications. Through the use of the article Brand Coolness from Warren et al (2019), the brand coolness dimensions scale was applied to verify if the posts or comments could fit in one of the ten dimensions explained through this study. The method used for the research was the Netnography at the Facebook page from the companies of study. Since the goal of this study was to verify the behaviour of the customer at the community of the brands selected, this method was the most suitable and coherent for the result expected.

Two companies were analysed: IKEA and Lidl. Both are retailers and multinational companies; however, they work for different customer profiles, market segments, have different types of services and communication. They were chosen to identify if the type of business also influences the type of posts at the communities, resulting in a different increase at the brand coolness perception.

First, this research can confirm that Brand Communities can influences and change the perception of Brand Coolness among its users. However, since the period studied had a pandemic scenario, this can also be a big influence in how the communities changed the perception of coolness of the studied brands, since the customer experience was mainly online and several companies had to adapt their communication, sales, logistics to fit in the new scenario.

Second, the results of the studies, suggests that the Brand Coolness scale (Warren *et al,* 2019) does not have the enough dimensions to cover the entire Brand Coolness subject. So, this study helps us expand the Brand Coolness scale, with a proposal of new dimen-

sions'. Customers can change their perception of coolness through time and through the situations that are affecting their lives. Also, different cultures and life perspectives can change this perception, so the ten dimensions in the article mentioned in this study, was not able to fit the entire comments analysed at study 1 and 2. I strongly recommend having a specific study to understand what new dimensions or sub-dimensions should be integrated at the Brand Coolness scale. As example: environmental and social sustainability, already mentioned through the research. These two new dimensions were found at the studies but did not fit with property in any current dimension. Below is possible to find a few examples of posts with these subjects:

"IKEA launches a campaign across all its platforms to position itself as a "strong ally" of the LGBTI+ community. Learn more here: http://bit.ly/BriefIKEA" (I784, May 2021, IKEA)

"(...) Prejudice is alive, we know, and it bites differently depending on the privilege. Nothing new here. There is still a lot to do, something we discussed in the last episode of the podcast Equally from @ikeaportugal, but #progressismade. The conversation is available on YouTube and Spotify. There we spoke with three IKEA employees, members of the LGBTI community (...)" (I787, May 2021, IKEA)

"(...) Brigada do Mar with its FRIENDS from the Transformar-Lidl Portugal project, Electrão, from Ya-maha Motor Portugal Junta Freguesia Gaio-Rosário and Fundação Salinas do Samouco removed more than 1500 kilos of stupidity in two days in addition to the many tons it has already withdrawn this year. (...)" (L935 December 2021, Lidl)

Third, it was possible to identify that the type of business generates a different impact on the comments left at the community. At the Study 1 (Lidl) the interaction through the period analysed, was more positive when compared to the Study 2 (IKEA). This can be explained by the type of business and also what the brand delivers. So, it is possible to conclude that for those two studies, the community impacted more the brand equity in a positive way to Lidl than IKEA. The Brand Coolness could be found easily at Lidl's community and could improve the brand perception.

As mentioned above, the period analysed includes the pandemic scenario that the world experiences from 2020 until today, and that is another factor that is important to emphasize, since that company that could adapt their communication and processes to the new reality, received better user comments/posts from the community.

The interactions at the Facebook community only grew and with the migration to the offline to online shopping, the communication and reviews in communities or other social medias, help the customer or the prospects change their mind about the brand.

Fourth, the gender of users was also a topic of the analysis. The importance of the female users and the growth of the other users through the period analysed is another important point to consider when creating the communication and managing the communities.

Lastly, this research selected retailers to be studied and even with similarities, there was different response from users, as previously mentioned. No study before this one, had the information that gender, industry or period of time could change the perception of coolness.

Therefore, this research extends the importance of brand communities in the brand coolness perception and shows that other variables are important to be studied (gender, industry, new dimensions…) to understand the reach of brand coolness among customers.

6.2. Managerial Implications

This research has also important managerial implications. Companies should pay attention to how they can use and reach a specific target at open communities to improve the brand coolness perception among users, because this will generate a positive impact at Brand Equity.

The results suggests that for study 2 the community was not so good to improve the perception of brand coolness when compared with the study 1. With that said, companies, should understand the gap of their communication versus what they are delivering to customers and with those inputs, manage the perception.

For study 2, the issue was the service of delivery, that was the point for the most complaints and the company could have tracked this through the community and fixed the issue so the image of the brand would not be affected, and the community could have helped increase the perception of coolness. With that, is possible to conclude that for companies such as IKEA (home and furniture retail), the efforts should be in provide good after-sales service, mainly in the delivery service since great part of the negative perception

was related to it. Nevertheless, the services provided at the store was very complimented showing that the workers are well trained and have a lot of professionalism. We suggest, to focus in improve the delivery services and also to start work with the most brand coolness dimensions perceived, such as Useful Extraordinary and Aesthetically Appealing, in their communication to boost the coolness perception.

For companies such as Lidl (food and grocery retail), the community already improves the brand coolness but we suggest to use it more to boost what they already have, create their own community to be able to control and extract data to anticipate what customers are looking at the stores, or which store location is the most talked among customers, and with that improve the retail experience and consequently the coolness perception.

Lastly, this research shows the importance of brand communities, not taking in consideration the close communities since it was not studied, not only for the brand coolness perception but for the brand equity itself.

In summary, the open communities can improve or damage the brand coolness perception among the users based on their experience with the brand. However, it would be important to analyse the closed communities or communities where the brand has full control of the information to identify where and how those can be used to change the brand coolness perception and understand how the brand can use the open and the closed community to improve their online communication and customer experience.

7. Limitations and Future Researches

The study of brand coolness has more layers than it shows. There are cultural impacts at the perceptions from the brands and also, the type of community analysed would change the conclusion of the study.

Since Facebook was used to collect the data, eventually the information was blocked or was not possibly go any further than what this study could because of the Facebook data rules. Also, the data was collected at Portugal's Facebook communities, and the perception can change with the country and culture linked to it.

For the future studies, it would be interesting to verify the impacts at closed and communities that are managed by the company. Also, create a comparison between the impact of the three (open, closed and managed by the company communities) for the brand coolness.

Furthermore, it is important to verify how customers of other nationalities would react at the communities of those brands at the same period of time to check how much of cultural impact we can have at the brand coolness and its brand communities.

To conclude the limitations, it would be important to analyse a more normal period of time to see if the use of the communities and type of posts would change and would fit better at the brand coolness dimension scale.

8. References

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