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Brand Iconicity vs. Anti-Consumption Well-Being Concerns: The Nutella Palm Oil Conflict

This article analyzes how an iconic brand is threatened by the societal trend of anti-consumption motivated by well-being. Under scrutiny is the iconic brand Nutella that is recognized worldwide. In France, it has been linked to public debates on well-being concerns about palm oil. Approaching the phenomenon from a consumer perspective and through observational netnography, we investigate the accommodation work undertaken by Nutella lovers in reaction to anti-palm oil attacks. We identify three major accommodation processes: neutralization, interiorization, and adhesion. Each of these processes is constituted of three different practices. Our study shows that while an iconic brand can resist anti-consumption claims thanks to its brand community, such disputes can cause the brand to lose part of its strength. We suggest that anti-consumption for an iconic brand such as Nutella may thus be ambivalent.

It is difficult to debate consumption today without mobilizing the notion of “brand.” Brands and related branded products and services are now seen as vessels of a system of cultural meaning (Holt 2004) helping consumers construct their own identities according to how they want to be perceived by the world. Brands transform consumption into an activity that supports the consumer quest for identity through brandfests, brand rituals, brand fandom, and so forth (Kornberger 2010).

The impact of brands on social and cultural life is more apparent in the case of iconic brands that play a strong ideological role in society (Holt 2006). As such, these iconic brands are often the target of anti-consumption actions (Thompson and Arsel 2004). Well-being defenders consider the consumption of products related to these brands as one of the main issues to be actively tackled (Pancer and Handelman 2012) and include unhealthy eating, effective and safe use of the Internet, substance abuse, tobacco consumption, etc. (Kinard and Webster 2010).

Instances of anti-consumption such as brand boycotts and other related actions against a brand (Lee et al. 2011) require researchers to examine the

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phenomenon from the consumer perspective (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010). The case of anti-palm oil activist attacks against the famous hazelnut-spread Nutella and the defense organized by pro-Nutella lovers provides a unique opportunity to analyze how iconic brands fall or do not fall victim to anti-consumption movements. The Nutella conflict began from the significant use of palm oil in making the hazelnut spread, associating the brand with concerns linked to environmental damage provoked by palm oil production and negative effects on health from its consumption. Through a netnographic analysis (Kozinets 2010) of web posts dedicated to this pro-Nutella/anti-palm oil dispute, the current research offers a contribution to understanding the subtle cross-over between the ideology of an iconic brand and the new ideological tension emerging in Western societies, namely, the pursuit of well-being through anti-consumption. Our results center on how consumers respond to and accommodate (Russell and Schau 2014) criticisms of the brand that originated from anti-palm oil attacks.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Iconic Brands, Cult Objects, and Their Communities

Iconic brands are the small fraction of brands carrying symbolism that is potent enough to yield influence on society and play an ideological role for consumers. Notable examples include Harry Potter (Brown 2002), Jack Daniel's (Holt 2006), Mountain Dew (Holt 2003), Mini (Brown 2004), Lego (Antorini, Muñiz, and Askildsen 2012), and Starbucks (Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel 2006). Indeed, a brand becomes an icon when it delivers innovative cultural expressions by offering a compelling myth, a story that can help people resolve tensions in their lives (Holt 2004). "People use iconic brand symbolism to firm up their identities and to enact the basic status and affiliation processes that are the bread-and-butter functions of all symbols" (Holt 2006, 357). An iconic brand is collectively valued in society as a widely shared symbol of a particular ideology for a certain group of people who use the brand in their everyday lives to experience this ideology and in this way soothe anxieties resulting from acute social change. Almost all the iconicity of these brands stems from a cult object, such as the brand Vespa from its scooter (Eco and Calabrese 1996), which is an object that creates a world entirely structured in such a way that fans can cite episodes and protagonists of the life of the object as if they were aspects of their own actual lives (Cova 2014).

In the majority of cases studied in academic literature, the iconic brand is a corporate brand. This removes the distinction between the brand and

the company that owns it. For example, the term “Apple” is used interchangeably to refer to the overall Apple brand and to the firm itself. A few studies deal with iconic brands of companies that bear a different name such as Mini belonging to BMW (Brown 2004) and Nutella belonging to Ferrero (Cova and Pace 2006).

Iconic brands and cult objects provide the dominant blueprint that fundamentally shapes the way many consumers live. The communities formed around these provide social structures that connect people from different countries and cultures (Muñiz and O’Guinn 2001). Within these communities, people share the same enthusiasm for the brand, including feelings of spiritual and religious excitement, fervor, zeal, and adoration together with a quasi-addiction to the object (Pimentel and Reynolds 2004).

In Search of Well-Being through Anti-Consumption

Anti-consumption is a growing societal trend that discourages the ever-increasing purchase and consumption of material objects to avoid the erosion of our societal values and the deterioration of our environment in terms of resource consumption (Pancer and Handelman 2012). This is linked with “consumerism” or the political and social movement seeking to protect consumers (Rotfeld 2010) while integrating the proactive stance of consumers.

Anti-consumption, whether due to political convictions, personal economy, or simple fatigue, is gaining a foothold as a significant trend of consumer culture in Western societies (Choi 2011). Indeed, anti-consumption has gathered momentum during the last decade thanks to an increasing number of books such as Naomi Klein’s *No Logo* (2000) and films such as *Surplus* (dated 2003). There are different levels of anti-consumption: at the micro level, some people may choose to resist certain brands or products (Thompson and Arsel 2004), at the macro level, other people may want to resist the ideology of consumption as a whole (Black and Cherrier 2010). Anti-consumption includes boycotting, consumer resistance, activism, culture-jamming, dissatisfaction, complaining behavior, and voluntary simplification. Brand anti-consumption can take the form of brand avoidance (Lee, Motion, and Conroy 2009): experiential avoidance (from unmet expectations in previous experiences), identity avoidance (symbolic incongruence), or moral avoidance (ideological incompatibility).

Anti-consumption movements seem to affect iconic brands directly and obligate these icons born from previous societal tension to face new anxieties. This often creates conflict between the community of brand enthusiasts and the anti-consumption activists.

Brand Communities and Moral Conflicts

A brand community is a co-consuming group of people who have a common interest in a specific brand and create a parallel social universe, non-geographically bound but abounding with its own myths, values, rituals, vocabulary, and hierarchy. On a sociological level, brand communities herald new forms of collectives in contemporary society where communities form around symbols rather than create symbols (Stratton and Northcote 2014).

Brand communities unleash the consumers' desire to contribute to the culture, myths, or histories of the brands they love. Luedicke, Thompson, and Giesler's (2010) analysis highlights the moralistic identity work that consumers undertake within the Hummer brand community that emerged when Operation Desert Storm generated a period of patriotic fervor in the United States. At the same time, Hummer has frequently been condemned for exemplifying the worst excesses of American culture. The adversarial formulations and stigmatizations claimed by anti-consumer activists led Hummer enthusiasts to lament the decidedly un-American attitude of their critics and attackers while proudly asserting the core values on which the nation is founded and through which it has prospered. These "brand-mediated moral conflicts" (Luedicke, Thompson, and Giesler 2010) between Hummer adversaries and Hummer lovers show that brand lovers build on pre-existing societal tension (i.e., American patriots vs. un-Americans) to maintain the iconicity of the brand.

Rosenbaum (2013) analyzes another type of moral conflict between the members of a long-standing brand community—the Jeeps—and environmentalists. Jeep people perceive themselves as facing negative stereotyping—stigmatization—that constitutes an existential threat to their personal and collective identities, and demand access to natural areas for their maintenance and articulation. Jeepers feel that environmentalists are actively trying to shut them out of the wooded areas they use for their communal activities. In this case, the long-running iconic brand and its community are threatened by a new societal trend. However, Rosenbaum (2013) does not focus his research on the clash between the Jeep ideology and the new ideological tension as a result of growing environmentalism, and does not account for the evolution of the conflict over time.

Our research goes one step beyond Rosenbaum's work by focusing on how iconic brands fall or do not fall victim to moral conflicts brought about by the new wave of anti-consumption well-being concerns. To this effect, it focuses on the way this new tension unfolds and progressively "traps"

the iconic brand, and how the members of the brand community react to it. It thus contributes to our knowledge on brand iconicity (Holt 2006), brand community (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001), and anti-consumption (Lee et al. 2011).

METHODOLOGY

“Participant observation and a respect for folk models—that is, a willingness to engage the consumer on his or her own turf with no particular managerial worldview to defend—are the defining features of marketing ethnography” (Sherry 1995, 21). Using an ethnographic approach, we investigate consumer reactions expressed during a moral conflict centered on an iconic brand, Nutella, and the controversy brought about by anti-consumption movements. Online ethnography refers to several related online research methods that adapt to the study of communities and cultures created through computer-mediated social interaction. Prominent among these ethnographic approaches is “netnography” (Kozinets 2010). As a modification of the term *ethnography*, netnography designates online fieldwork that follows from the conception of ethnography as an adaptable method. Netnography is participant-observational research and the data can take three forms: (1) data the researcher directly collects, (2) data generated through the capture and recording of online community events and interactions; and (3) data the researcher sketches as field notes (Kozinets 2010).

We conduct a netnography of the second type—that is, “observational netnography” (Kozinets 2010), between the start of the dispute against Nutella in June 2010 and its quasi-conclusion in June 2013. As Nutella consumption is well-grounded in French culture, our analysis focuses particularly on the impact of a critical incident in France.

We analyze individual posts of consumer opinions of Nutella and the palm oil issue from different web sources. Using the Google search engine, we select relevant newspaper articles, blogs, forums, and discussion groups as well as pages on social networking sites (i.e., Facebook and Twitter). French keywords or pairs of keywords are used such as “Nutella” and “palm oil” or “Nutella” and “amendment” or “Nutella” and “tax” in order to select from among the many online conversations on palm oil only those that also involved the Nutella brand. In so doing, we look at the intersection between Nutella’s ideology and the evolving debate on well-being. Following their order of appearance on Google search outputs, we select the sources based on the pertinence of their content and the presence of a discussion thread among consumers up to arriving at the

point of theoretical saturation, when no new themes emerge from the data (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

We collect texts from comments provided by readers of 13 articles in web newspapers, 11 blogs, four forums and one discussion group (in total, 1,082 posts), four Facebook pages, and two Twitter pages (data on web sources available on request). Thus, the data include threads of spontaneous consumer discussions or media-initiated discussions.

Moreover, to provide contextual information on how Nutella became an iconic brand and the evolution of the new palm oil issue in France, we conduct extensive documentary research accessing online and off-line secondary data sources such as books; newspaper articles; company, association and government websites; and statistical reports.

THE NUTELLA CASE

From a Cheap Version of Chocolate to an Iconic Brand

Nutella was born as *Supercrema*, a spreadable version of Gianduja, a type of chocolate produced in the Piedmont region in Northern Italy, partially replacing cacao with a cheaper local product: Langhe hazelnuts. It was launched in 1951 by the Ferrero family group and offered a good solution to mothers who after the Second World War sought to provide their children with high energy breakfasts/snacks at a reasonable price. The ritual is still in the memories of Baby Boomers: going to the small local shop with a handful of coins and a slice of bread, they watched the seller plunge the knife into a big jar of the sweet cream and spread it on their slice of bread. These memories represent Nutella's inception.

The name Nutella was introduced in Italy by the Ferrero family firm in 1964 and in France the following year and was then used to appeal to consumers all over Europe. Michele Ferrero refined Nutella's recipe, adding soy lecithin to improve its stability, and chose the name "Nutella." The brand is still identified with graphic elements designed in the 1960s: the black and red Helvetica logo and the illustration of a knife on a slice of bread, with a glass of milk and Langhe hazelnuts. The recipe is still the original, although the ingredients are now supplied by a larger number of countries in addition to Italy: sugar, vegetable oils, hazelnuts (13%), low-fat cocoa (7.4%), skimmed milk powder (6.6%), lactose, and lacto serum powder. The secret of Nutella's unique taste and texture, however, is in the way these ingredients are mixed in terms of proportion and temperature. In addition to soy lecithin—a stabilizer—vegetable oils also play a crucial role and are added in the phase called "crushing." The specific smoothness and the creamy character of Nutella derive from this emulsion.

Nutella has been a top brand for Ferrero since its infancy and defined a completely new market. Nutella is today a global success. Every 2.5 seconds a jar of Nutella is sold across the world; approximately 75 million hazelnuts are used daily in production cycles; more than 30 books have been written entirely dedicated to the brand; in 2009, its Facebook page was the third most liked, ranking just behind the fan pages of Barack Obama and Coca-Cola.

As a source of energy “for doing and thinking” as the famous slogan recites, Nutella since the 1960s represents the brand that unifies the family sharing happy moments around the breakfast table. It implies conviviality, happiness, generosity, simplicity, and pleasure. However, it was only in the 1980s that Nutella became an iconic brand. Post-68 social changes that strongly disrupted the family structure in the Mediterranean area, both in Italy and France, led to introducing protest and hedonism in the family setting in the 1970s and 1980s. Instead of unsettling family life, Nutella enables alleviating the tension between order and disorder. The Italian sociologist Sassatelli¹ argues that the images that surround Nutella are all related to children and family, “to a very well-governed treat” but at the same time Nutella “allows you little forms of transgression: it’s a spread so you can dirty yourself a bit, but it’s just for fun. I think that in the course of the history of Nutella, this is something which has been played on a lot: Nutella as a polite transgression.” A Nutella lover declared, “for me nothing compares to the feeling I get when I stick my finger into a giant jar of Nutella, really, these are great and exciting sensations you only get with this jar of nut spread” (Cova and Pace 2006, 1096).

The way Nutella soothes tension between family order and transgression is exemplified in the 1984 film *Bianca*. The image of Nanni Moretti naked in front of the giant pot mobilized Nutella as a pleasant and warm refuge, a comforting friend in hard times. In the dead of night, silent and upset after a prohibited night of love with a colleague, the mathematics professor Apicella-Moretti finds consolation and pleasure in big slices of bread and Nutella. The association with energetic and healthy child growth and with happy familial consumption made Nutella “the acceptable sin,” so although chocolate based, Nutella was “good” for both the body and spirit, and ultimately “good” for consumer well-being. Today, Nutella is nostalgic-romantic in its trans-generational character, accompanying the life of the whole family with its cocooning action.

1. Mitzman, Dany. 2014. Nutella: How the World Went Nuts for a Hazelnut Spread, *BBC News Magazine*, May 17, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-27438001>

A World Iconic Brand Community with a French Touch

The marketing director of Ferrero Travel Market, Alberto Donnini, recently commented on the global iconicity of Nutella: “The brand power of Nutella is amazing; even we marketers in Ferrero are surprised by the way in which consumers are willing to engage with the brand. Who would have thought that travellers would purchase a huge 5kg jar of the chocolate spread and carry it with them on their journey? They are buying it because it is yummy, of course, but also because it has a cult following all over the world.”²

Consumer willingness to engage with Nutella is particularly visible on the Internet. An example is the MyNutella community, a space offered in 2003 by the company to a group of hardcore Italian fans (Cova and Pace 2006). Favoring individual expression through personal blogs, the website sustained Nutella’s cult and myth, adding the dynamic relationship between genuine consumer stories (existing in real sociological contexts) and the reality reproduced in mass-marketing messages. An evolution of MyNutella is the Italian web-community NutellaVille, which was created in 2008 as a virtual city, a platform linked to the main social networks where anyone could create an avatar and meet other inhabitants to share content and be informed on the latest news on the product. Separate from Ferrero’s driven actions, which were mainly limited to the company’s national boundaries, a plethora of spontaneous consumer initiatives inspired by Nutella unceasingly popped up on the web worldwide. A famous example is Gnutella, a program with a Nutella-sounding name in honor of the passion for the product used to exchange files. Moreover, information is easily accessible online on thousands of Nutella parties organized each year around the world by local communities and private consumers, blogs of Nutella-based recipes, poetries and other odes to Nutella, songs and even videos celebrating Nutella. Since 2007, these consumer productions have invaded the web each year on February 5, the date chosen by Nutella fans as NutellaDay, “to celebrate, to get creative with, and most importantly, to eat Nutella” (excerpt from the World Nutella Day website).

Despite its global diffusion, the cultural and emotional appropriation of Nutella by consumers is so deep that they tend to think of it as a local brand. France is a representative case as one of the countries most attached to Nutella. The brand Nutella was introduced in France in 1965 to replace the French version of *Supercrema*. Almost 50 years later, Nutella is an integral

2. Morgan, Colleen. Exclusivity and Innovation Drive Ferrero’s New Lines for Cannes. *The Moodie Report*. http://www.moodiereport.com/print.php?c_id=&doc_id=36863; retrieved August 21, 2014.

part of French culture. Not by chance are Nutella's primary consumers in France families with children where traditional family festivities such as Candlemas are strongly associated with Nutella. The Pelikan pot, with its unmistakable shape, has also entered into French collective imagery and for years its lid has contained different surprises linked to the national soccer team or to cartoon characters. Today, many French fans keep ordering pots with customized labels with their own names or a sentence they have chosen. Currently, the French are the largest group of consumers of Nutella in the world. Although representing 0.86% of the world's population, they constitute 25% of Nutella's world consumption, with 75,000 tons of nut spread consumed each year. Even in recent years affected by the economic crisis, Nutella sales in volume have grown by 3.4% despite a price increase of 3.5%. The Web reflects these data. According to Facebook, the French are among Nutella's greatest fans, with Nutella's page ranking fourth among the most followed pages in France. Despite the global diffusion of the brand and its massive consumption, Nutella has rarely been attacked by French consumers or by public opinion in general and ranks among the preferred brands in France.

THE MORAL CONFLICT

Nutella Mixed with Palm Oil Well-Being Concerns

Nutella as an iconic brand has recently suffered from the attack of activists arguing against palm oil consumption. Since 1998, as a result of different non-government organization activities, awareness of the negative consequences of using palm oil has increased. The main issues relating to the use of this ingredient in industrial foodstuffs concern the increasing demand for this substance, obtained from intensive palm oil cultivation especially in Malaysia and Indonesia, to the detriment of rainforests and peatlands. Its cultivation damages the critical habitats of many species, causes massive soil erosion, and increases water, air, and soil pollution. Local inhabitants are also damaged through expropriations and child and slave labor in unsafe working conditions. Another aspect pertains to the nutritional and health concerns of palm oil, as some scientists contend that consumption leads to obesity and related diseases.

Nutella was first mentioned in relation to the palm oil issue by Greenpeace Italy in 2008 but the action only lasted a few days and failed to ignite consumer interest in the dangers. Later, in June 2010, aiming to fight rising levels of obesity, the European Parliament issued a draft proposal to use a "nutritional semaphore" indicating good, medium, and dangerous levels of sugar, fats, and salt on food packaging. Although the law proposal was

eventually retired, it provoked the reactions of the Italian government and Ferrero's representatives in defense of Nutella. The public debate, with Nutella at the center of discussions not just in France but also all over Europe, inevitably led consumers to become more aware of the high level of palm oil contained in its spread.

Different signs of consumers becoming conscious of Nutella containing palm oil appeared at this stage. For instance, in 2010, consumers started posting comments on online newspaper articles (e.g., Huffington Post and Le Figaro), on their own blogs (e.g., La Maison du Faucon), or in discussion groups (e.g., Google group) attacking or defending Nutella with reference to the law proposal. Videos made by young consumers circulated on YouTube in 2011 showing how Nutella liquefies in the sun at hot temperatures, with palm oil surfacing to the top. In 2011, anti-palm oil bloggers started taking an interest in Nutella, which for the first time appeared in their list of brands shared with other consumers wanting to avoid palm-oil consumption (on the blog *vivresanshuiledepalme*).

However, the event that definitively put Nutella at the core of the palm oil issue in France was the proposed measure in November 2012, initially passed by the Senate, to impose a 300% tax increase on palm oil as its consumption generated high healthcare costs. Although not approved, the measure nicknamed "Nutella amendment" placed Nutella at the center of the media storm. "Palm Oil: Nutella Amendment, It's Not Only for Kids" (cited in Liberation 2012), "The Controversy Sparks on the Nutella Amendment" (cited in Les Echos 2012), "Nutella Soon Harder Taxed" (cited in TF1's website 2012), are just some examples of the many headlines illustrating that the brand Nutella was strongly tied to the palm oil issue. News reports and inquiry documentaries were broadcast. Nutella ended up being pointed out as the product par excellence containing palm oil, whose negative effects on health were strongly denounced by the law proponents. Nongovernment organizations such as the WWF regretted the imbalanced attention on the health issue and revamped their position on the environmental matter. The industry (and Nutella in first place as a symbol of the entire category) was accused of neglecting the many concerns surrounding palm oil and of continuing its use for financial convenience. Thus, in the proponents' view, the tax should have induced companies to replace palm oil with healthier alternatives. The draft law was controversially perceived as a sign of fascist dietary resurgence or an admirable example of the state educational role to protect public health. In the midst of the debate, competitor responses were not long in coming: a case in point is the comparative advertising from Casino comparing its private label palm oil-free nut spread with Nutella. Columns

FIGURE 1
Nutella's Two-Page Answer to the Amendment in French Newspapers

L'huile de palme, parlons-en.

Depuis 50 ans, la confiance des Français nous engage à être une grande marque, c'est une grande responsabilité. C'est pourquoi nous avons toujours fait des choix responsables dans la sélection de nos ingrédients.

Aujourd'hui, l'huile de palme, de manière injuste, au cœur d'un débat sur l'huile de palme, à nous semble important de vous apporter les précisions suivantes.

Nutella est composé essentiellement de noisettes, de cacao, de lait en poudre, de sucre et d'huile de palme. C'est l'huile de palme qui garantit l'équilibre et la stabilité de la recette. Nous l'utilisons parce qu'elle permet d'obtenir la consistance souhaitée sans avoir recours à des procédés d'hydrogénation des matières grasses, qui peut occasionner la formation d'acides gras trans.

L'huile de palme que nous utilisons est extraite des fruits de palmiers à huile cultivés en Malaisie et en Indonésie. Ces cultures fruitières n'ont jamais été touchées par un virus d'origine 100% d'huile de palme durable et végétale. En 2015 et en novembre 2008 de la FIPIC, une ligne verte ouverte à la fois au public et à une filière d'approvisionnement durable, respectueuse des hommes et de l'environnement. Ferrero continue à mettre en place des systèmes de traçabilité certifiés en maintenant son soutien à l'équilibre. [Plus d'informations](#).

Conformément aux règles reçues et à certaines communications opportunes, dans le cadre d'une information équitable, l'huile de palme n'est pas dangereuse pour la santé. Elle présente, en termes de matières grasses, un profil nutritionnel proche de celui des autres.

Les nutritionnistes le disent : ce qui doit être surveillé, c'est la consommation de matières grasses saturées. Or, une tartinée de Nutella contient moins de matières grasses saturées que le plupart des gâteaux ou petits pâtisseries.

Comparaison des acides saturés				
	100g	100g	100g	100g
Beurre	81	81	81	81
Crème fraîche épaisse	19,3	4,9	19,3	19,3
Crème fraîche allégée	3,4	3,4	3,1	3,1
Yaourt à la vanille	46,3	47,6	45,3	39,9

Si vous souhaitez en savoir plus, contactez-nous sur nutellaparlonsen.fr

Publi-communication

Note: Left: “Nutella, it’s delicious, but why does it contain palm oil?” Right page: “Palm oil, let’s talk about it”

providing “critical analysis” and “nutritionists’ viewpoints” multiplied: some accused Nutella of subtly intoxicating the French youths’ blood; others questioned the effectiveness of the measure since it attacked a “giant” supported by an entire generation of young “Nutellomaniacs” who would be unlikely to stop eating Nutella.

This media uproar provoked a strong response from Ferrero. The company placed full-spread ads in French newspapers in defense of its harmless use of palm oil (Figure 1), and, under the claim “L’huile de palme, parlons-en” (“Palm oil, let’s talk about it”), created a dedicated website and a Twitter page to provide detailed explanations to consumers on Nutella’s ingredients, nutritional characteristics, and production processes.

At this point, fostered by the media debate and by Ferrero’s resounding response inviting consumers to “talk about it,” French consumers restarted to actively debate, protest, and boycott Nutella, as visible on the Web.

Attacks on Nutella Based on the New Ideology

This time, the comments proliferated not only in newspaper pages but also in TV forums (e.g., Les Maternelles, TF1), Nutella’s web pages, and

FIGURE 2

An Image from a Forum on Health Concerns (*forum.doctissimo.fr*)



Note: Top to bottom: “Should we throw away ... Nutella? The spread is under the spotlight in Brussels. The reason: its 60% sugar and palm oil content. Representatives deny wanting to impose a “dangerous product” label on the jar, but at the same time issue a warning.”

social networks. The discussion quickly spread on the Web. More bloggers were now interested in Nutella and its ingredients, especially those engaged in cooking, environmental, and anti-palm oil issues. Nutella was no longer just one of the many products to avoid amongst others on a long blacklist but entered into anti-palm oil blogger topics. Consumer reactions were differently constituted as societal or individual interiorized tensions and with different targets such as the product, the brand, or the company.

Nutella as a product was broken down into all its chemical components (Figure 2), highlighting its high levels of palm oil and its danger to health.

aol2012: Why don't we say also that this super Nutella makes some monstrous damages on cholesterol levels of our youth? Adolescents aged 15 suffer from too high cholesterol levels due to Nutella. Not to mention the sugar... We should even double this tax on Nutella! May be young people would eat it less... (**Le Monde—newspaper**)

“Melting Nutella” videos began to be posted and watched online. The product characteristics were compared to new palm oil-free hazelnut spreads available on the market as the following quotes show.

Lolo: Not only Casino spread doesn't contain palm oil (well, we are aware that it is still a fat product), it is also tasty (and I have been brought up with Nutella, I know what I am talking about!) and less expensive, much less expensive than Nutella. It has won for me! (**Consoglobe—newspaper**)

Sandra Cloitree: I watched the video about Nutella and I can't get over it. Me, who believed that it was better to consume Nutella instead of a cheap brand [...] (**Cestmafournée—blog**)

Nutella's recipe was also accused of having addictive effects on consumers who could not help but eat the nut spread. As such, consumers considered the product as more of a chemical than a food item and compared it to cigarettes and alcohol (e.g., many pictures of Nutella circulate on the web in the form of syringes).

The following post entitled "Nutella is dead," written on her blog by a young and ethic consumer, Antigone XXI, vividly illustrates these arguments.

Antigone XXI: Love Nutella? Great. Enjoy it. I don't.

Well, yeah. I used to love it. Before, when I discovered it, I loved it, I even adored it. To the extent that I'd eat it straight from the jar. No spoon, just my fingers. I know, it's not terribly hygienic. But it's not all that bad ... because after all, I don't share my Nutella. A jar is for me. Just me. And it got empty really, really fast. Terribly addictive, isn't it?

Terribly addictive indeed ... but not surprising, because the truth is that Nutella would contain monosodium glutamate, aka E621 deeply hidden in the famous word "flavourings." You know, glutamate, the flavour enhancer that would stimulate appetite and maliciously destroy neurons [...] Fine, fine, I'm not telling you anything new when I mention that Nutella is 70% palm oil and refined sugar [...] Oh, but wait, there's hazelnuts and cocoa at any rate! Oh yeah, well, 20% of the finished product ... not bad for a spread that should be composed of 2/3 ...

Fine, end of discussion. As for me, I say Nutella is dying. (**Antigone XXI in her blog**)

Ferrero and its communications and declarations were also strongly attacked while Nutella was attacked because its chemical composition was unsafe and contributed to illnesses and to rising public health expenses. The company was under scrutiny because it misled consumers, especially children and their mothers, making them believe that Nutella was nutritious and good for health. Slogans, advertising, and images on the jar—claim activists—drew attention to those ingredients that Nutella contains less of such as nuts and cocoa.

Françoise ARNDT: Come on! Is it finally time to stop this addiction to the drug-Nutella, isn't it? We speak of obesity and of no-control of the food swallowed every day!!! And Nutella [Ferrero company—Ed.] would like to claim it is the fundamental nutritional element I must be dreaming ... it's a dirty trick ... When are we going to get it over with this hypocrisy..? [...] (**Le Monde—newspaper**)

Similarly, palm oil was indicated as disguised in the list of ingredients using many different scientific synonyms that were unclear to consumers. The company and its communications on sourcing policies were criticized, with activists suggesting that by using palm oil, Nutella indirectly sustained deforestation and endangered the survival of several species. Adrien Gontier, an anti-palm oil activist who had avoided consuming palm oil for a year, summed up all these concerns in his blog that received increasing attention from consumers and the media:

Adrien Gontier: After its counter attack in paper version, Ferrero churns out again a new advertisement. Some observations ... What's inside a pot of Nutella, in reality? Without changing its habits the company "forgets" to specify that there is more palm oil than nuts in its spread. After a 40 years usage it speaks of "sustainable palm oil." So many years to start wondering! In the meanwhile palm oil has been responsible of 80% of Malaysian deforestation. Finding labels now, it is just too late. [...] From a nutritional viewpoint Nutella offloads its responsibilities arguing that the consumption of its product must be made with moderation. [...] Its advertisements are always the same. [...] Words are very important, and Ferrero knows it very well. Therefore it can lead to confusion stringing together empty and unverifiable statements as if nothing had happened (**vivresanshuiledepalme—blog**).

FINDINGS ON CONSUMER ACCOMMODATION

Nutella Lovers' Reactions during the Dispute

Consumer reactions during the dispute represent the ways of accommodating the brand to new social tensions and the inverse, namely, the processes with which Nutella lovers draw sense and meaning from anti-palm oil critics of the brand and the processes with which they try to fight against these criticisms. This accommodation work varies along two extremes, with different outcomes combining and balancing Nutella's ideology and the new well-being ideology. On the one hand, devotion to Nutella and its ideology helps consumers resist to varying degrees the many well-being related arguments of the anti-palm oil attacks and "save the brand." On the other hand, the new ideology can influence consumer adoption of the accommodation work to "save their well-being."

The analysis highlights the wide range of accommodation work (Russell and Schau 2014) undertaken by consumers to deal with the criticisms of an iconic brand resulting from anti-consumption ideology and well-being concerns:

- Neutralization of the new ideology, which leads consumers to defend the brand in order to keep it as is and reinforce their brand devotion.
- Interiorization of the new ideology, which results in consumers being torn between changing the brand and changing themselves.

- Adhesion to the new ideology, which moves consumers to produce multiple brand surfeits thus putting the brand at risk.

Neutralization

According to our results, a certain number of consumers—rather numerous in terms of messages posted—were willing to defend the brand Nutella. Even if understanding the well-being concerns brought by anti-consumption activists, they neutralize them. Neutralization is defined here as the process of making an idea ineffective, to counteract or nullify it. It is also a process through which people turn off inner protests when they do—or are about to do—something they themselves perceive as wrong. The theory of neutralization originated in criminology studies (Maruna and Copes 2005) and today applied to deviant consumption (Piacentini, Chatzidakis, and Banister 2012) sheds light on these types of accommodation processes that enable consumers to dissociate themselves from criticisms in relation to their consumption.

We recognize three practices of neutralization:

- Appealing to higher loyalty, whereby consumers give priority to Nutella's ideology over the new ideology.
- Denying damage, whereby consumers reject the claim of negative effects of Nutella's consumption or assert that no damage to health will occur due to moderate consumption of Nutella.
- Condemning the condemners, whereby consumers shift attention from the ideology to the motivations and behaviors of Nutella's attackers, framing the anti-palm oil activists as fundamentalists whose claims are based on dubious pharmaceutical laboratory results and opportunistic contentions from Nutella's competitors.

In the quotes below for instance, health issues, even when recognized, are rejected in the name of happiness and pleasure, two values at the core of Nutella's ideology:

Elpoueto: Yes, let Nutella be... It makes some happy!!! (**Huffington Post—newspaper**).

Visitor: "It is so good and even if we know the consequences, it will be hard to stop..." (**Justerealiste—blog**).

Denial of damage, on the other hand, is demonstrated in the response below where the addictive power of Nutella is ironically commented on and at the same time negated:

Alain Stéphan: Personally I think that (the word should not be even written) is a drug. Worse than cannabis, the new "Beaujolais"—a kind of wine, Ed.—heroin,

opium, cocaine, brown-sugar, and ecstasy. It is the worst of drugs. We should simply forbid it and send special squads to people's homes to empty their cupboards. I've bought a pot of this ... just once in my life and I've understood: I will never buy it again. It's too good. Compared to it, dulce de leche is just sugared water ... (**Le Monde—newspaper**)

Another example are consumers who advocate that consuming Nutella in moderation is not harmful and somehow re-using the same argument proposed by the company itself in its official responses:

Stellamooi: A spoon of Nutella a day, is it unhealthy? In the end everything is bad for health but as we have to die one day, I'll continue to eat it, while being aware of what I swallow. Isn't it ok?

Kimeo: "We have to die one day" this doesn't impede that we would all like to stay in good health until the fateful day ...

Stellamooi: Eating a spoon of Nutella from time to time it's not that that will give you a bad health. (**Huffington Post—newspaper**)

Finally, other work discredits the new ideology through the "condemnation of the condemners," identifying the competing interests of other economic actors as the origin of the new ideology.

Shackleton: But get out of youth's hair and leave their cholesterol alone! Any dietary restriction has never lowered cholesterol levels and I wonder from where you get that adolescents aged 15 suffer from high levels of cholesterol due to Nutella, maybe a fascist-sanitary burp? To recall, cholesterol is not a problem as affirmed too often, just pharmaceutical laboratories and nutrition ayatollahs had invented a money-making illness ... (**Le Monde—newspaper**)

T.: Who are we kidding? The group Casino launches a new spreadable cream at the same time the Nutella tax project is launched ... isn't it a bit organised? [...] (**Consoglobe—newspaper**)

Josmar: There's nothing better than Nutella and it's not because of the systematic stigmatisation made by certain lobbies dedicated to the promotion of their own products that I'll change my mind. (**Huffington Post—newspaper**)

Consumers advocating that in the end the choice should be left to the individual also participate in the same discreditation work. Exhortations that the individual exercises his/her right to decide what to eat downgrade the new ideology to an authoritarian obligation:

Vieuxpapiers: Prohibiting ... extreme solutions straight away. There is anyway something simpler to do: do not buy this product. This implies of course that parents are responsible and have the necessary and sufficient character to resist the cries and whims of their kids in front of supermarket shelves ... and it's not a done deal!

SwissAlps: Don't buy it if you don't like and leave in peace the others.

Violette34: It is needed sometimes to educate people despite themselves

SwissAlps: No.

Violette34: When it's about their health and Earth's health, YES, it does!

SwissAlps: Always not. It's terribly condescending, and most of the time this leads to catastrophes.

Violette34: It's your ideology that leads us straight to the wall of catastrophes!!
(**Huffington Post**—newspaper)

Consumers applying the above neutralization practices are able to understand and evaluate available information on palm oil and Nutella. However, rather than developing expertise on the risks associated with this type of consumption (Rotfeld 2010), they prefer to argue against this ideology that can damage the iconicity of the brand they are devoted to. In doing so, they co-create and spread discourses that give any Nutella lover the possibility of relinquishing the new tension and support the idea that the brand should be kept as it is. As such, they ultimately reinforce the overall devotion to the brand.

Interiorization

Some Nutella consumers interiorize the new ideology that provokes deep tensions within them and leads to different types of reactions toward the brand. Interiorization is defined as the process of making an idea part of one's inner being and/or mental structure. An idea is said to be interiorized when it can be carried out through mental representations (Piaget 1949).

We identify three interiorization practices:

- Backtracking, which refers to the attempt made by consumers to change their behavior—dropping Nutella—but ending in failure due to their addiction to the product, consumers thus go back to Nutella.
- Lobbying the company, another practice enacted by consumers who expect the company to solve their inner problem, namely, in order to keep consuming Ferrero's Nutella products, transform them into healthy products, in other words, palm oil free.
- Reframing taste, which refers to the practice of consumers trying new palm oil free Nutella-like recipes with the aim of progressively becoming more acquainted with them than the original Nutella.

In the first case, consumers do not perceive the brand as the same because of the new ideology. However, they do not change their consumption habits as they declare themselves unable to break with the brand and its products. These Nutella lovers have even deeper concerns whereby they consider Nutella not only risky for health but also

addictive. These consumers even try to give up Nutella and make attempts to produce home-made nut spreads, but confess that they are dependent on Nutella and therefore eventually go back to it:

JOLO49: I have been also brought up with Nutella, I consume it every day. Often too much. No, I am not going to tell you about certain evenings on the sofa with my pot and my spoon ... ! I would be too ashamed! More seriously, I have already looked for palliatives, motivated by the state of my purse. I have tried the hard discount brands, the private labels. Some are acceptable. But up to now, I have always gone back to my first love, Nutella ... nothing compares with it! (**Consoglobe—newspaper**)

In the second case, consumers interiorize the new ideology and therefore pressure the company to change the product without altering its taste. Torn between whether they should give Nutella up or not, these consumers act as lobbyists attempting to influence Ferrero and convince the company to change its recipe. This would eliminate the contaminant and allow their relationship with Nutella to return to being healthy and permissible:

Le coucou: I adore Nutella, but I curse every time that I buy it thinking that it is stuffed with palm oil. I don't understand why this bit of dirt is not replaced with an honest vegetable oil. (**La Maison du Faucon**)

JOLO49: Ferrero, if you can hear me ... could you please replace your palm oil? (**Consoglobe—newspaper**)

BatDW6T: If we want that Nutella changes for the better, let's stop consuming it, in this way sales will drop and maybe Ferrero's flagship product will be revised and amended. (**Huffington Post—newspaper**)

The third case concerns consumers who have interiorized the new ideology and force themselves to change taste, to start appreciating alternatives and forget Nutella. For instance, sometime they consume both home-made spreads and the original Nutella, reframing their Nutella consumption within new situations:

LaBelette06 I am absolutely addicted to Nutella, it's my vice [...] but I have enjoyed [the home-made spread—Ed.], you feel the roasted nuts but it's the granular aspect which disturbs me. Actually, the two spreads are so different that I think we shouldn't even compare them. Michakella's taste is so refined and so flavoured that I will try to find for it a nobler use than Nutella [...]

Some consumers are able to adapt to new tastes while others still try to reproduce Nutella's taste at home, as revealed by the following quotes:

Soucatra: [...] As for the taste, the home-made spreads are better, often less sugary: once you have tried them, Nutella seems so sugary! Another difference is the texture: Nutella is smooth, difficult to obtain at home. But it is a matter of taste [...] (**Antigone XXI's blog**)

Anna: Since I am a bit intoxicated with Nutella, I have made your recipe slightly sweeter adding more sugar [...]

AntigoneXXI: Sweeter than that? No problem! I must admit that I haven't tasted Nutella since ages so that I wouldn't even be able to say how it exactly tastes! (**Antigone XXI's blog**)

When they are no longer able to negotiate between the anxieties they have interiorized and Nutella's ideology, consumers capitulate and undertake a process to abandon Nutella and to find satisfaction in substitutes. Some are just at the beginning of their "treatment" as this extract of a post published on Valerie's blog shows:

Loloche: I am one of the 99.99% addicted ones to nutnut [nickname for Nutella-Ed. note] ... but I am under treatment ;-) I myself, even not being a green one, progressively take care of what I eat and especially of what I give to my children! (**Cestmafournée—blog**)

Other consumers are more determined:

Oniriq: In a word as in 100, we can eliminate Nutella from our shopping lists ... there are other nut spreads which do not contain palm oil, we can even make spreads ourselves. I am in favour of pure and simple boycotting. The Ferreros have clearly said it, they won't change their recipe, therefore too bad for them. (**Huffington Post—newspaper**)

Consumers applying the above interiorization practices struggle to find solutions to keep experiencing the intense pleasure associated with Nutella's consumption at all costs. They even turn to alternatives, change Nutella's formula, or force themselves to change so as to be able to derive pleasure from consuming different products. Since most of these efforts are in vain and end in failure, they ultimately reinforce the unique pleasure from consuming Nutella. Most of these consumers still support the brand and beg for a change in Nutella's recipe to defend their beloved brand from new ideology attacks and to save their unique relationship with Nutella. Most of these practices in the end have a soothing effect on consumer nerves (Zhou et al. 2013). They free consumers from anxiety and responsibility relating to the proven difficulty of obtaining a tasty product similar to Nutella without palm oil.

In their search for solutions, consumers pressure Ferrero via the Internet to provide palm oil free Nutella. They act as stakeholders of the brand who enter into a co-creation process with the company. The end result could be the repositioning of the brand on the market and in society so as to deal with the new well-being ideology. However, faced with an uncooperative reaction from the company, some consumers may drop the brand altogether.

Adhesion

The results also show that some consumers adhere to the new ideology and the risks it emphasizes of Nutella and palm oil consumption. In a religious context, adhesion is usually understood as linked to what is regarded as sacred and is revered due to an association with holiness (Paloutzian and Park 2013). Adhesion is defined here as the act of supporting and pledging allegiance to an idea and thus adopting the related practices.

We identify three main practices, often intertwined, to adhere to the new ideology:

- Confessing one's past sins, in other words, one's former addiction to Nutella, is a firm break with one's past and a ritual of adhesion to the new ideology. This confession ritual signals that the consumer is leaving Nutella's community to enter the new well-being community.
- A major act of adhesion to the new ideology consists in boycotting the once-beloved Nutella. This also includes changing one's own taste and appreciating alternative products that replace Nutella.
- Another practice goes a step further by creating alternative products, loving their taste and disseminating them and their recipes in order to educate other former Nutella lovers.

Consumers adhering to the new ideology admit that consuming Nutella is a sin and they shamefully confess they have done it in the past and state that they have now left it behind:

Antigone XXI: [...] Ah, [I] also loved Nutella before ... but I would not be able to go back to it now, I love my Choconette too much! (**Antigone XXI's blog**)

A former Nutella addiction and initial hesitation to adopting new nutellas (in common noun form to signify this is not the branded Nutella product but an alternative) are confessed:

Elodie: Hallo, I've just done this marvellous homemade nut-spread. I confess that before doing it I was not really convinced by the taste that it would have resulted as being an indisputable fan and also addicted, I would say, to the famous Nutella (**Cestmafournée—blog**)

In some cases, even some memories of "a previous life" can reappear:

Méla10: [...] I know that some are going to enjoy this evening [my home-made Nutella—Ed.]! And, that beats everything, I have made all of this wearing a nice Nutella apron!! (**Cestmafournée—blog**)

We observe that confession is an essential practice in brand communities. Previous studies suggest that brand enthusiasts confess their action

in relation to the ethos of the brand community. Luedicke, Thompson, and Giesler (2010) report the confessions from a Hummer owner and brand community member in response to criticism of Hummer ownership. Moisiso and Beruchashvili (2010) show that confession is a key therapeutic practice in Weight Watchers support groups. By making confessions, and giving and receiving feedback, members produce and reproduce the brand community by explicating and interpreting the key values of the community ethos. However, in this case, consumers do not confess their action in relation to the ethos of the brand community but in relation to the new ideology that stigmatizes the brand and its consumers. In doing so, they act against the iconic brand and question its community ethos.

In most cases, the best alternative to Nutella proposed is a home-made nut spread. Former Nutella lovers make many experiments and continuously test new recipes of home-made spreads, which are “baptised” with names often mimicking the name Nutella. The accommodation work therefore consists in creating new healthier and even tastier versions.

Sophie: Well children’s verdict is: «Mum it’s a real killer!!!» «It’s better than Nutella»...it’s a festival of compliments! To be repeated [...] (**Cestmafournée—blog**)

Antigone XXI: [...] It’s clear, why should you buy Nutella when you can obtain a one thousand better result at home, and so easy to make? [...] (**Antigone XXI’s blog**)

Sarah: Verdict by sms [on the home-made Nutella by relatives—Ed.]: “Choconette is better than Nutella and there are even no crap things inside!” It wins unanimous support! (**Antigone XXI’s blog**)

However, the accommodation work can go further. This is not only about changing the product and one’s own taste. Some former Nutella lovers need help and must be sustained in their efforts. Therefore, those who are more determined to embrace the new ideology undertake tougher accommodation work, which consists in “educating” nutella maker neophytes, as Valérie and AntigoneXXI do via their blogs:

Valérie: You do make me happy Elodie!!! Knowing that a Nutella addict has been convinced by my nut-spread is top for me! If after having tried my recipe only one person doesn’t buy anymore this poison then, just for that, it will have been worth it to publish it! (**Cestmafournée—blog**)

Antigone XXI: Well for being hooked on Nutella, you have had also the courage to test the homemade version: well done! And I’m happy that you like it! [...] (**Antigone XXI’s blog**)

What comes across in the above accommodation processes is the production of home-made nut spreads (often called with the generic name “Nutella”) and setting up blind tests (Nutella vs. other commercial

competitors or homemade spreads). In this case, the adhesion mainly takes the form of creating brand surfeits (Nakassis 2013). Surfeits are those material forms that exceed a brand's authority and intelligibility. Examples include fakes, brand-inspired goods, overruns, defective goods, and generics. In linking "counterfeits" and other unauthorized brand forms with the novel and often unpredictable social meanings that emerge through moments of brand consumption, Nakassis (2013, 123) argues that "the brand is troubled by the surfeit of social meaning that is constantly produced by idiosyncratic and contextualized experiences of consumer engagement with brand forms (authorized or otherwise)." Preaching against the former love brand and co-creating healthy alternative products consumers call "nutella-something" puts Nutella at risk of brand genericide (Walsh 2013).

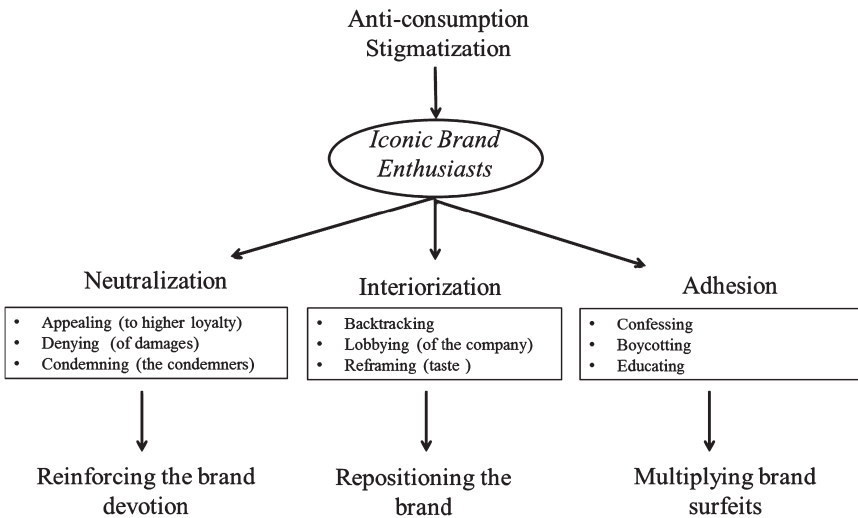
DISCUSSION

Save the Brand vs. Save Well-Being

The Nutella/palm oil dispute shows that anti-consumption based on consumer well-being can generate diverse reactions in brand enthusiasts that range (Figure 3) from saving the brand (and putting consumer well-being at risk) to saving consumer well-being (and putting brand equity at risk). Three major processes are at play, each of which is sub-divided into three different practices enacted by brand enthusiasts. Taken in isolation, each of these major processes has a different effect on the brand. When enthusiasts neutralize the anti-consumption attacks, their actions tend to reinforce their devotion to the brand and thus the strength of the brand. When enthusiasts interiorize the anti-consumption attacks, their actions tend to change the positioning of the brand in their minds and/or in the market by putting pressure on the company. When enthusiasts adhere to the well-being ideology brought by anti-consumption attacks, their actions trouble the meaning of the brand through the multiplication of brand surfeits and thus diminishing the brand's strength.

The Nutella ideology vs. the well-being ideology tension can have different intensities and provoke accommodation actions that are proportionally strong and blatant. This tension is weak, almost non-existent, for those Nutella lovers who do not share the new ideology: these consumers only perceive an echo of the tension from the external world. As Nutella lovers embrace the new ideology, they increasingly feel the clash of its dissonance and interiorize it, so that the societal anxieties resonate more and more with them. Just like a rubber band, the greater the tension the bigger the reaction, so that accommodating actions become more ruffled, concrete,

FIGURE 3
Brand Enthusiast Accommodation Processes



and unrestrained. Until the breaking point is reached, the balance between the Nutella ideology and the well-being ideology sees the latter prevailing and the tension devouring Nutella consumers becomes irreconcilable. Consumers thus move away from Nutella, and the devotion initially dedicated to this brand is transferred to Choconette and other homemade brands as well as to evangelizing other consumers.

The overall accommodation process is osmotic: not only does Nutella enter into the moral debate, but the brand itself is also transmuted by this debate, especially in the eyes of its brand community (Cova and Pace 2006). This is an important aspect emerging from the dispute under consideration. Indeed, in contrast to previous studies (e.g., Luedicke, Thompson, and Giesler 2010; Rosenbaum 2013) that show the solidarity of the brand community around the brand while strengthening its identity in opposition to other brand communities or “un-branded”/ “anti-brand” groups, in this case, the dissension occurs within the community itself. Many of the examples cited are from converted and preaching consumers who now avoid Nutella and refer to their “ancient passion” or from brand lovers, accusing others “you! you love Nutella!” proving that the two opposing groups both belong to the same former community. This moral conflict is an internal conflict that could lead the consumer to a state akin to a small schizophrenia crisis. Moreover, the discussions on the blogs resemble those of Alcoholics Anonymous who confess their deviations.

In the Nutella/palm oil case, the changes brought about by the anti-palm oil movement to the way Nutella lovers think of their consumption seem to have created a support group of “Nutella anonymous” where one can share her/his deviations and be understood by others. Thus Nutella consumers have become “fellow sufferers” united by shared struggles as suggested by Moisio and Beruchashvili (2010).

Accommodation work appears to have different effects on the brand. However, these communal and individual debates lead to the generation of more brand content for Nutella, and as such, augment the bulk of meanings associated with this brand. Brown, McDonagh, and Shultz (2013, 14) argue that “the conventional brand management literature emphasizes the perils of opacity and the necessity for clarity. However, the consumer-captivating allure of ambiguity is increasingly being recognized by advertising researchers” as a way of augmenting brand content since ambiguity and enigma are essential for iconic brands to build their aura.

From this perspective, the ambiguity that is at the core of the Nutella conflict—a debate developed around an iconic brand—may even have a positive effect in terms of branding. This is the case of other examples discussed in the literature such as Red Bull (Allen, Fournier, and Miller 2008), the success of which was built by leveraging negative consumer discourses around the brand, thus cultivating the brand’s mythology. Thompson and Arsel (2004) show that pro- and anti-Starbucks discourses structured consumer perceptions of the competitive landscape of an entire category. At the core of all these instances, and we propose also in the Nutella case discussed here, brand value goes beyond simple evaluation judgments (positive vs. negative) to include the “brand-as-story” notion (Allen, Fournier, and Miller 2008, 813). The guiding tenet of this perspective is the narrative, which being ambiguous and equivocal, and thus also including negative stances, generates involvement and multiple interpretations that ultimately create and enhance brand value.

This research is not without limitations, the main one being that by analyzing the discussions on the blogs and other websites, we rely more on representations than on actual consumer behavior. In relation to this point, despite that we acknowledge that the market for “fake” social metrics such as followers or fans is growing, we could not verify the authenticity of the sources of the messages analyzed. We also specify that the phenomena analyzed only concern a small portion of Nutella’s customer base, those highly attached to the brand and therefore taking part in its brand community. However, as is the case for other iconic brands (Antorini, Muñiz, and Askildsen 2012), this small group has a big share

of voice on the Internet—even if it does not represent a big share of the market—and as such can influence other consumers and even the company. Moreover, the analysis specifically refers to France, a Western developed country where consumers are sensitive to anti-consumption and well-being concerns. It would be interesting to analyze how an iconic brand compares with such a trend in another cultural context that is less sensitive to sustainability and health issues such as those concerning palm oil. Finally, studying the friction between brand iconicity and a new ideology, one could refer to anti-consumption movements supported by strong nationalism such as that among Chinese consumers that prompted boycotts of foreign brands on a massive scale (Choi 2011).

CONCLUSIONS

Our results suggest that a dispute arising between iconic brand enthusiasts and anti-consumption activists produces accommodation work (Russell and Schau 2014) from the brand enthusiasts that can include three key processes: neutralization, interiorization, and adhesion. Each process contains its sub-defining practices. Together these processes show that iconic brands fall or do not fall victim to anti-consumption movements. Figure 3 presents a framework to enable understanding the overall process that leads from anti-consumption stigmatization to neutralization, interiorization, or adhesion by enthusiasts and the potential effects of such processes on the iconic brand.

Thus, our study shows that an iconic brand can resist anti-consumption claims thanks to its brand community and that, at the same time, with such a dispute the brand can lose some of its enthusiasts. The overall result for the brand is ambivalent but not clearly negative as one could expect. Indeed, the neutralization and interiorization processes participate in the production of consumer-generated brand content whereas adhesion processes puts the brand at risk of genericization.

Scholars who examine iconic brands are aware of such effects, but much work has concentrated on what kind of tension can generate the iconicity of the brand. Our findings and conclusions focus on what kind of effects new societal tension, especially anti-consumption, could have on brand iconicity.

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