



# Toward a conceptual understanding of co-creation in branding

Sarasvuo Sonja<sup>a</sup>, Rindell Anne<sup>a,\*</sup>, Kovalchuk Marina<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Marketing, Centre for Relationship Marketing and Service Management, HANKEN School of Economics, P.O. Box 479, FI-00101 Helsinki, Finland

<sup>b</sup> Business School University of Eastern Finland P.O. Box 1627 FI-70211 Kuopio, Finland

## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Co-creation in branding  
Systematic search  
Critical review  
Definition of co-creation in branding

## ABSTRACT

Co-creation in branding is gaining momentum. This study contributes to the branding literature by combining a systematic search and a critical review of 148 articles focusing on co-creation in branding, published in 55 academic journals. Three themes guide this critical review: (1) What is co-creation? (2) Who initiates and who participates in co-creation? (3) What is co-created and for whom? The findings reveal that co-creation is considered a process of interaction and influencing among various participating parties. A classification of different types of co-creation crystallizes the conditions under which co-creation is proposed to occur. This article contributes by proposing a new definition as a starting point to guide further research: Co-creation in branding refers to a process of intentional interaction between or among two or more parties that influences a brand. Three positioning questions are proposed for future research. Marketers may gain significant new market understanding through cocreation in branding.

## 1. Introduction

In the current global and dynamic marketplace characterized by growing consumer power, companies are recognizing the need to increase their social engagement (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). In line with this trend, scholars have turned to the concept of co-creation, typically referring to interactions between firms and customers for the purpose of creating value (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Oertzen et al. (2018) emphasize that “co-creation is rooted in the verb *create*, which is defined as bringing something into existence, causing something to happen as a result of one’s actions, and in *co*, which means together with another or others” (p. 642). Thus, co-creation can be understood as *creating together*. Co-creation as a concept has been applied to various marketing and management fields, including strategic management (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), service and relationship marketing (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), product innovation (Nambisan & Baron, 2009), advertising (Thompson & Malaviya, 2013), retailing (Jafari et al., 2015), information technology (Chuang & Chen, 2015), consumer psychology (Martínez-Cañas et al., 2016), and branding (Jones, 2005).

It is proposed that co-creation in branding focuses on how the marketer and multiple stakeholders influence brands through interactions or dialogues (Hatch & Schultz, 2010). It is typically suggested as a collaborative process of sharing (Kaufmann et al., 2016). For the sake of clarity, in this article, a *marketer* refers to what is traditionally

called the sender perspective and is considered a party that directly represents a brand, such as a firm or an organization. A *stakeholder* refers to what is traditionally called the consumer or customer perspective and is considered a party that forms brand images. Co-creation has been suggested as leading to mutually beneficial outcomes (Berthon et al., 2009; Ind et al., 2013; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2018), such as strengthened marketer–stakeholder relationships (Kandampully et al., 2015). Furthermore, the marketer may obtain valuable stakeholder information (Millsbaugh & Kent, 2016), whereas stakeholders may gain stronger brand experiences (Payne et al., 2009; Dean et al., 2016) and engage in their creative interests (Ind et al., 2013) through co-creation. Nonetheless, it has been found that not all co-creation is collaborative and mutually beneficial, as it may as well add to heterogeneous and negative interpretations of the brand (Aspara et al., 2014; Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach, 2018) and even lead to loss of brand equity (Kristal et al., 2018).

Previous studies have also called for clarity in conceptualizing and using co-creation in branding (Biraghi & Gambetti, 2017; Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016). In response, this article contributes to extant research in two ways. First, it critically reviews (Snyder, 2019), identifies, and summarizes (MacInnis, 2011) how co-creation is understood and used in the branding literature by focusing on three themes: (1) What is co-creation? (2) Who initiates and who participates in co-creation processes? (3) What is co-created and for whom? Second, based on the

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [sonja.sarasvuo@hanken.fi](mailto:sonja.sarasvuo@hanken.fi) (S. Sarasvuo), [anne.rindell@hanken.fi](mailto:anne.rindell@hanken.fi) (A. Rindell), [marina.kovalchuk@uef.fi](mailto:marina.kovalchuk@uef.fi) (M. Kovalchuk).

critical review, a new definition is proposed: *Co-creation in branding refers to a process of intentional interaction between or among two or more parties that influences a brand*. This definition is intended to outline the scope (Palmatier et al., 2018) and guide the development of co-creation as a stream of research in branding.

Since co-creation was introduced to branding in 2005 (Jones, 2005), the interest in the concept has grown. This interest correlates with lively discussions on co-creation in the service literature, from which 30% of the reviewed articles apply the concept of value co-creation in branding contexts. However, over the years, co-creation in branding has developed toward its own research field. Interest in empirical studies has also increased. Fig. 1 illustrates the number of articles, available online in the selected databases from January 2005 to May 2020, which were selected for this review.

A major challenge concerning the conceptualization of co-creation in branding relates to the nature of branding as a phenomenon, as it involves influencing (i.e., branding) and being influenced (i.e., brand image). Generally, research approaches to brands may be classified into those that treat brands as literal entities, such as a brand name or promise developed through a marketer's branding activities, versus those that treat brands as processes and mental representations (Stern, 2006), such as a brand image or meaning. This distinction can be observed in the present literature review as well. In some reviewed articles, brands are treated as marketer-managed entities, while in most articles, brands are considered dynamic, mental representations.

An additional challenge is the multiplicity of perspectives on co-creation in branding, ranging from a marketer-centric brand management perspective (Juntunen, 2012) to a consumer perspective (Pongsakornrungrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011) or a collaborative perspective focusing on mutual branding goals for the marketer and stakeholders (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016). Since co-creation may have different outcomes for various parties (Sarkar & Banerjee, 2019), the conceptual landscape is also diverse. Moreover, the empirical contexts are numerous, encompassing corporate (Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018), product (Stach, 2019), service (Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014), industrial (Zhang, Jiang, Shabbir, & Du, 2015), luxury (Choi et al., 2016), retail (Merrilees & Miller, 2019), place (Green et al., 2016; Ripoll González & Gale, 2020), event (Suomi et al., 2020), and human brands (Centeno & Wang, 2017); public organizations and educational institutions (Schmeltz & Kjeldsen, 2019; Spry et al., 2018); and political or social movements (Black & Veloutsou, 2017; Samuel et al., 2018). This article suggests that the multitude of perspectives, diverse conceptual landscapes, and numerous branding contexts have led to ambiguity concerning what exactly is—and is not—co-creation. The lack of an accepted definition of a concept not only creates confusion but may lead to research continuing to spread in different directions without building on itself to create synergy (Stock & Boyer, 2009). This is a substantial challenge at this early stage of conceptual development, since without a clear definition of co-creation, it becomes problematic to advance the research stream toward maturity, which would also include developing appropriate quantitative and qualitative “measures that faithfully represent [the] domain” (MacKenzie, 2003, p. 323).

This article is structured as follows. After this introduction, the themes for the critical review and the method are presented. Next, the findings are presented in relation to the three themes, followed by a summarizing classification. The findings are then discussed, and a definition of co-creation in branding is proposed. Finally, the study's limitations and suggestions for future research are addressed.

## 2. Themes for the critical review

In pursuit of further clarity in defining the concept, the critical review is based on three themes:

- (1) *What is co-creation?* It has been mentioned that what constitutes the ‘act’ of co-creation in branding remains vague (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016). This theme focuses on how co-creation has been understood in the reviewed articles. The review also identifies how the occurrence of co-creation as a phenomenon has been measured and from which parties' perspectives. Measurement proposals are included, since the measurement of a phenomenon is an important part of defining a concept (MacKenzie, 2003).
- (2) *Who initiates and who participates in co-creation?* As Biraghi and Gambetti (2017) argue, the branding literature has been dominated by a metaphorical view of co-creation, emphasizing collaboration and participation yet failing to specify the roles of the parties involved. Thus, the review identifies the parties initiating and participating in co-creation.
- (3) *What is co-created and for whom?* This theme focuses on branding concepts referred to as outcomes of co-creation. As Sarkar and Banerjee (2019) recognize, co-creation may result in different outcomes for the different parties involved. For example, Swaminathan et al. (2020) recognize *brand experience* co-creation and *brand meaning* co-creation as separate types. Furthermore, *brand value* co-creation has been proposed as a sub-context of value co-creation (Saha et al., 2020). However, prior studies on co-creation in branding have not synthesized the diverse outcomes in the conceptual landscape.

Next, the method used for the systematic search and the critical review is presented.

## 3. Method

A systematic search and a review were conducted to combine the strengths of a critical review with a comprehensive search process (Grant & Booth, 2009). The systematic search and review approach includes analysis and conceptual innovation beyond mere descriptions of the selected articles, while benefiting from acknowledging multiple study types and methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the reviewed literature (Grant & Booth, 2009).

*The search and the article selection process* follow a systematic approach, aiming for replicability and transparency to reduce researcher subjectivity and bias (Tranfield et al., 2003). *The critical review and*

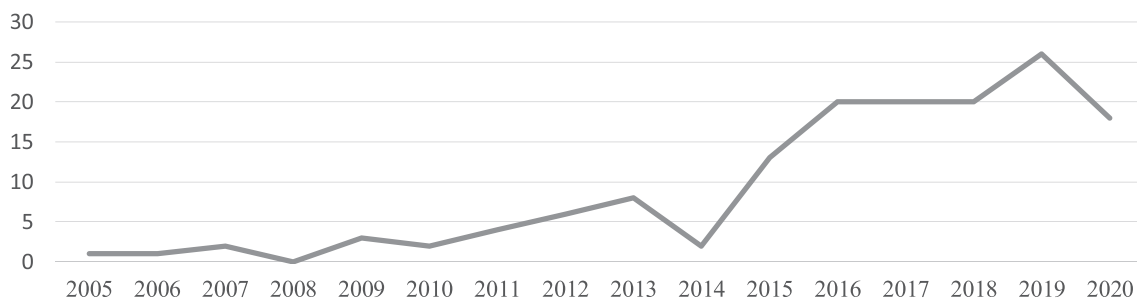


Fig. 1. Number of selected articles on co-creation in branding, available from January 2005 to May 2020.

analysis aim to critique and synthesize the literature, allowing new perspectives to emerge (Snyder, 2019; Torraco, 2005).

Next, the search, article selection, and critical analysis are described, along with the statistics of the selected articles.

### 3.1. Systematic search and article selection process

The systematic search and article selection process included three stages: (1) search, (2) exclusion, and (3) snowball sampling to encompass the variety and complexity of existing research (Grant & Booth, 2009). The selection process is summarized in Appendix A.

- (1) Search stage. Searches were conducted in Scopus and the Web of Science Core Collection to identify relevant peer-reviewed scientific articles. These databases provide comprehensive access to research in multiple disciplines and were chosen to ensure sufficient journal coverage. Specifically, the keywords ‘brand’ and ‘co-creation’ were used to generate a single search string—brand AND co-creation—for the purpose of identifying research that incorporates both concepts. Based on the search, a spreadsheet containing 721 articles was created, with information on titles, authors, journals, publication years, and links to abstracts.
- (2) Exclusion stage. The selection was narrowed based on pre-determined criteria. First, sufficient article quality was ensured by excluding articles from journals not listed in the Academic Journal Guide 2018, which identifies recognized research in business and management (CABS, 2018). This guide was used as a journal quality indicator based on four impact factors: the Journal Citation Reports impact factor (JCR), SCImago Journal Rank (SJR), Source Normalized Impact per Paper (SNIP), and Impact Per Publication (IPP) (CABS, 2018). Generally, assessing article quality based on impact factors has the advantage of minimizing researcher bias and allows including in the selection recently published articles with fewer citations. A constraint of this method is that it considers citation potential rather than the actual number of citations of each article. Based on this quality assessment, 141 articles that were not in the abovementioned guide were excluded. Furthermore, 103 articles were disregarded since they were not published in marketing and management journals (including agriculture, anthropology, architecture, arts, engineering, history, human geography, information sciences, journalism, psychology, sociology, and technology). Additionally, 288 articles were discarded since they did not include the words ‘brand’ and ‘co-creation’ in their abstracts. After this, the full manuscripts of the remaining articles were assessed to confirm their positioning in branding—that is, they provide implications for branding theory or practice, while addressing co-creation in line with this review’s aim. Following this stage, 45 articles were excluded because they were not positioned in branding research.
- (3) Snowball sampling stage. Snowball sampling was used to identify additional articles covering early conceptual development. Since the initial search results excluded key articles published before 2008 (i.e., when co-creation was in its infancy in branding), Walker’s (2010) suggestion to extend the selection beyond database contents was followed. In addition to the selected 144 articles, 4 were identified, covering early conceptual development from 2005 to 2007. The final selection therefore includes 148 publications (20.5% of the initial search results).

### 3.2. Critical analysis

In the initial phase of the analysis, each article was examined individually by two researchers and then discussed to reduce researcher bias (Snyder, 2019). To approach the analysis systematically, a spreadsheet was created, detailing the methods, empirical contexts, and core

concepts presented in each article. Columns were included for the themes. The resulting content comprised 100 pages of double-spaced text (Times New Roman, font size = 12). Subsequently, the articles were compared to identify emerging categories under each theme (1–3). In Section 4.1.3 on measuring co-creation (Theme 1), both qualitative and quantitative measurement proposals using the terms ‘co-creation’ and ‘measure’ were included in the critical review. In the section 4.3 on the conceptual landscape (Theme 3), Grönroos and Voima’s (2013) framework on value creation spheres, published in the service literature, was applied to support categorization.

### 3.3. Descriptive statistics of selected articles

The selected 148 articles came from 55 journals on marketing and management. The highest number of articles were derived from the *Journal of Business Research* (17.0%), followed by the *Journal of Product & Brand Management* (7.5%), the *Journal of Brand Management* (6.8%), and *Marketing Intelligence & Planning* (6.8%). Fig. 2 outlines the number of articles from each included journal.

Various approaches to the topic of co-creation were applied, as follows: conceptual (17% of the studies), qualitative methods (i.e., case studies, ethnography, netnography, interviews, focus groups, observations; 47%), quantitative methods (i.e., surveys, structural equation modeling, experiments, text mining; 26%), mixed methods (4%), literature reviews (5%), and commentaries (1%). Regarding empirical contexts, 27% of the articles focus on business-to-customer (B2C) product brands (e.g., cars, electronics, fashion, fitness products, FMCG, and toys), 21% on B2C service brands (e.g., sports events, art/music festivals, financial services, food services, hospitality, and retailing), 19% on mixed/unspecified B2C brands, 16% on place brands (e.g., attractions, cities, countries, and territories), 9% on public or non-profit organizations (e.g., arts organizations, childhood education, higher education, national sport organizations, and political cause organizations), 7% on business-to-business (B2B)/industrial brands (e.g., components, information technology, and software), and 1% on personal brands (e.g., celebrities). Notably, 54% of the empirical studies include various online contexts, such as social media and online brand community settings.

## 4. Findings from the critical review

Guided by the three themes, the analysis reveals varying perspectives on co-creation in branding. An overview of the literature review is presented in Fig. 3, specifying the number and percentage of articles in each emergent category. Not all reviewed articles could be positioned in single categories, as some indicated multiple perspectives. A full overview is found in Appendix B.

### 4.1. Theme 1: What is Co-Creation?

The review reveals that co-creation is typically perceived as a *process* of interaction or influencing among stakeholders and that brands continuously evolve among multiple actors. Two perspectives on how co-creation occurs are identified: through (1) interaction or (2) influencing without interaction, as summarized in Table 1. Additionally, the review identifies proposals on how to quantitatively or qualitatively measure co-creation (i.e., interaction or influencing).

#### 4.1.1. Interaction as co-creation

First, *interaction* among multiple parties is suggested as an underlying process for co-creation. Authors distinguish between marketer–stakeholder interactions, with influencing from one party to another (B2C, B2B, or customer-to-business [C2B]<sup>1</sup>), as identified in 67% of the

<sup>1</sup> B2C/marketer-to-stakeholder; B2B/marketer-to-marketer; C2B/stakeholder-to-marketer

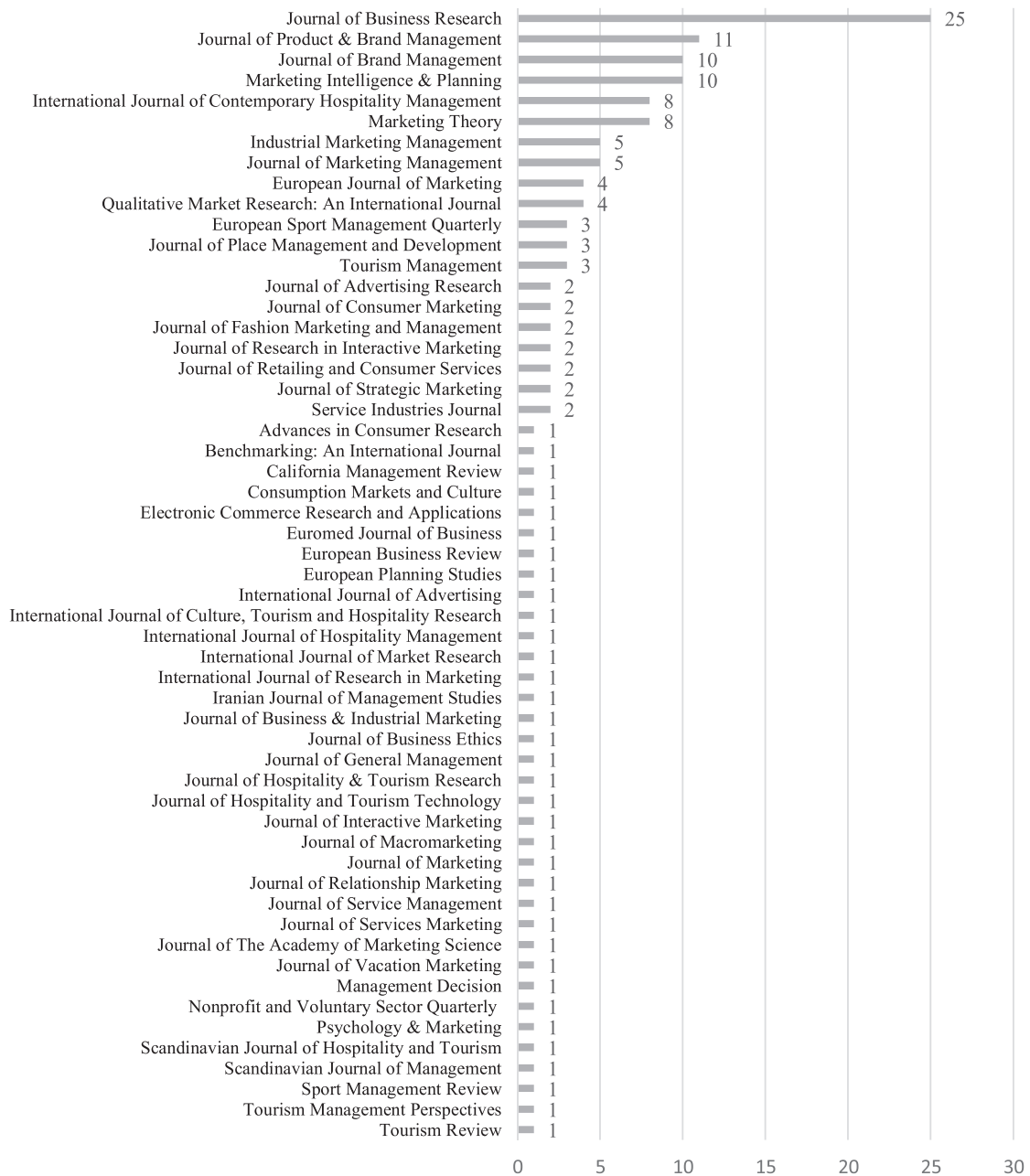


Fig. 2. Number of articles selected per journal.

articles, and interactions among stakeholders (customer-to-customer [C2C]<sup>2</sup>), as identified in 47% of the articles. For example, in B2C settings, Swaminathan et al. (2020) suggest that societal institutions, including firms, interact with stakeholders to shape stakeholder-level outcomes. From a consumer perspective, France et al. (2015) note that in C2B settings, “direct interaction [...] might include participating in an online competition for product improvement.” France et al. add that in C2C settings, “indirect co-creation [...] may include the customer involving the brand with other customers, friends and family and other networks” (p. 853). In B2B settings, Mingione and Leoni (2020) view co-creation as a “nested and network-based process of interactions between the corporate brand [marketer], its business stakeholders, and final consumers” (p. 90).

Some authors consider a direct marketer–stakeholder interaction a

prerequisite for co-creation (Choi et al., 2016; Iglesias et al., 2013; Ind et al., 2013; Ind et al., 2017; Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014), suggesting that co-creation in branding implies direct, intentional dialogue or collaboration between the marketer and stakeholders. Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2016) and Yu et al. (2020) also argue that co-creation occurs on purposefully created platforms for marketer–stakeholder engagement with brands.

#### 4.1.2. Influencing without interaction as co-creation

Some articles place less emphasis on marketer–stakeholder interaction, suggesting that co-creation occurs through *influencing* among multiple stakeholders. Overall, 51% of the articles reflect this perspective. Payne et al. (2009) argue that “two aspects facilitate the co-creation of a brand: communicating the brand; and acting upon the brand. Either the customer or the supplier, or both (and potentially other stakeholders) may be involved” (p. 383). In the context of city brands, Green et al. (2018) state that brand meanings may be symbolically co-created

<sup>2</sup> C2C/stakeholder-to-stakeholder

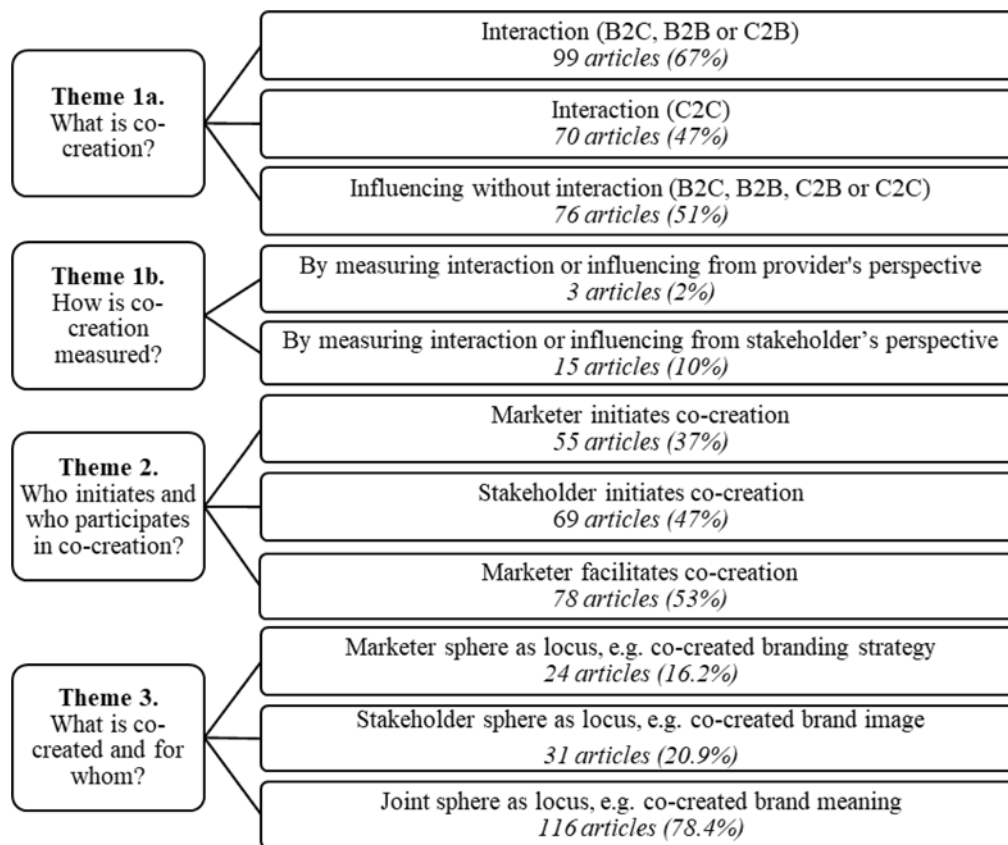


Fig. 3. Overview of the literature review.

by multiple stakeholders through social construction processes. Kristal et al. (2018) further introduce the concept of non-collaborative co-creation, implying that stakeholders may playfully—or even in an attacking manner—co-create or co-destroy brand meanings. These perspectives exclude interaction between stakeholders as a requirement for co-creation, instead suggesting that co-creation occurs through influencing and being influenced on a mental level—even unintentionally. On one hand, marketers may influence stakeholders' (B2C or B2B) perceptions of brand meaning (Fujita et al., 2019), brand value (Merz et al., 2009), or brand identity (Iglesias et al., 2020). On the other hand, stakeholders may indirectly influence marketers' branding activities (C2B or B2B) by contributing to the marketers' learning and development, for instance, their understandings of improving product and service quality (Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018) or brand communications (Pathak & Pathak-Shelat, 2017).

From a C2C standpoint, most studies on co-creation in branding are conducted in the context of social media (Cheung et al., 2020; Yazicioğlu & Borak, 2012) and online brand communities (Brodie et al., 2013; Shen et al., 2018). In these digital spaces, stakeholders may generate content (Koivisto & Mattila, 2020), which may shape brand meaning by influencing non-participants' perceptions (Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013).

Finally, according to certain articles, co-creation occurs if stakeholders' perceptions of a brand align with marketers' proposed brand promises, brand value propositions, or brand attributes (Anker et al., 2012; Boyle, 2007; Starr & Brodie, 2016). This perspective does not emphasize interaction as a requirement for co-creation but resembles the traditional idea that 'strong brands' are able to influence and lead stakeholders' perceptions in the desired direction.

In conclusion, the reviewed literature suggests that co-creation may occur either with or without purposeful interaction through a process of influencing among various parties.

#### 4.1.3. Measuring the occurrence of co-creation

Proposals for measuring co-creation are identified in 18 articles (12.2%). Processes may be assessed using various methods (Pettigrew, 1990; Sminia, 2009), and the reviewed proposals measure co-creation during specific occurrences in time, reflecting 'snapshots' of co-creation processes.

The reviewed articles mostly propose quantitative measurement scales or techniques (89%), while only a few include qualitative proposals on how to assess co-creation (11%). Proposals from the marketer or the stakeholder perspective on *interaction* with or *influence* on the corresponding party are presented in Table 2. Notably, some proposals refer to value co-creation as used in the service literature but applied in branding contexts (Chang et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2017; Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014; Rather et al., 2019; Sanz-Blas et al., 2019; Seifert & Kwon, 2020; Zhang, Jiang, Shabbir, & Du, 2015).

First, from a marketer perspective, three measurement proposals are identified. Zhang, Jiang, Shabbir, and Du (2015) measure value co-creation as the marketer's *perceived interaction* with its stakeholders, focusing on mutual problem solving. He et al. (2018) measure value co-creation in B2B contexts, focusing on firm–supplier collaboration. From an interactive perspective as well, Chang et al. (2018) suggest that customer value co-creation can be measured through a marketer's perception of its customers' participation in decision making, information sharing, and mutual problem solving.

Second, from a stakeholder perspective, three articles focus on the *willingness to interact with or influence the marketer*. Christodoulides et al. (2012) measure perceived co-creation from stakeholders' point of view, focusing on the willingness to have an online dialogue with a firm and create content. Rather et al. (2019) and Tajvidi et al. (2020) also suggest that co-creation may be measured with an emphasis on stakeholders' *willingness to interact with other stakeholders*. Six articles measure *perceived interaction (C2B)*, focusing on stakeholder attitudes and

**Table 1**  
What is co-creation?

Perspective	Freq.	References	Examples
Interaction (B2C, B2B or C2B)	99 articles (67%)	Aal et al., 2016; Ahn et al., 2019; Alden et al., 2016; Aspara et al., 2014; Berthon et al., 2009; Biraghi & Gambetti, 2017; Brodie et al., 2006; Brodie & Benson-Rea, 2016; Brodie et al., 2017; Busser & Shulga, 2019; Carlson et al., 2019; Cassia & Magno, 2019; Chang et al., 2018; Cheung et al., 2020; Choi et al., 2016; Christodoulides et al., 2012; Cova et al., 2015; Cova & Paraque, 2016; Davari et al., 2017; Dean et al., 2016; Essamri et al., 2019; Fisher & Smith, 2011; France et al., 2015; France et al., 2018; Fujita et al., 2019; Gambetti & Graffigna, 2015; Gambetti et al., 2016; Glanfield et al., 2018; González-Mansilla et al., 2019; Green et al., 2016; Green et al., 2018; Grenni et al., 2020; Grohs et al., 2020; Gyrd-Jones & Kornum, 2013; Hakala & Lemmetyinen, 2011; Hanna & Rowley, 2015; Hatch & Schultz, 2010; He et al., 2018; Iglesias et al., 2013; Iglesias et al., 2020; Ind et al., 2013; Ind et al., 2017; Ind et al., 2020; Jones, 2005; Juntunen, 2012; Kandampully et al., 2015; Kaufmann et al., 2016; Kennedy, 2017; Kennedy & Guzmán, 2016; Kennedy & Guzmán, 2017; Kim et al., 2018; Kristal et al., 2018; Källström & Hultman, 2019; Lee et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2018; Lindstedt, 2015; Masiello et al., 2020; McLeay et al., 2019; Merrilees, 2016; Millspaugh & Kent, 2016; Mingione, Cristofaro, & Mondì, 2020; Mingione, Kashif, & Petrescu, 2020; Mingione & Leoni, 2020; Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014; Oliveira & Panyik, 2015; Omar et al., 2020; Payne et al., 2009; Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016; Rather et al., 2019; Ripoll González & Gale, 2020; Roncha & Radclyffe-Thomas, 2016; Rosenthal & Brito, 2017; Rossolatos, 2019; Roy et al., 2019; Saha et al., 2020; Sarkar & Banerjee, 2019; Scandellius & Cohen, 2016; Schmeltz & Kjeldsen, 2019; Seifert & Kwon, 2020; Seljeseth & Korneliusen, 2015; Shao et al., 2015; Skälén et al., 2015; Solem, 2016; Sorensen & Drennan, 2017; Spry et al., 2018; Suomi et al., 2020; Swaminathan et al., 2020; Taks et al., 2020; Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach, 2018; Thomas, 2018; Tynan et al., 2010; Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2018; Veloutsou & Black, 2020; Voller et al., 2019; von Wallpach et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2019; Zhang, Jiang, Shabbir, & Du, 2015; Zhang, Kandampully, & Bilgihan, 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct, intentional dialogue or collaboration between a marketer and stakeholders (Choi et al., 2016; France et al., 2015; Iglesias et al., 2013; Ind et al., 2013; Nysveen &amp; Pedersen, 2014)</li> <li>• Interaction on purposefully created platforms for marketer-stakeholder engagement with brands (Ramaswamy &amp; Ozcan, 2016; Yu et al., 2021)</li> </ul>
Interaction (C2C)	70 articles (47%)	Aal et al., 2016; Alden et al., 2016; Aspara et al., 2014; Bento et al., 2018; Berthon et al., 2009; Bertschy et al., 2020; Black & Veloutsou, 2017; Brodie, 2017; Brodie et al., 2013; Busser & Shulga, 2019; Carlson et al., 2019; Centeno & Wang, 2017; Cheung et al., 2020; Chiang et al., 2017; Christodoulides et al., 2012; Cova & Paraque, 2016; Davari et al., 2017; Essamri et al., 2019; Fisher & Smith, 2011; France et al., 2015; France et al., 2018; Gambetti & Graffigna, 2015; Green et al., 2018; Grenni et al., 2020; Grohs et al., 2020; Hajli et al., 2017; Hakala & Lemmetyinen, 2011; Healy & McDonagh, 2013; Hollebeek et al., 2017; Kandampully et al., 2015; Kaufmann et al., 2016; Kennedy & Guzmán, 2016; Koivisto & Mattila, 2020; Kucharska, 2019; Källström & Hultman, 2019; Lee et al., 2017; Lucarelli, 2019; Luo et al., 2019; McLeay et al., 2019; Merrilees & Miller, 2019; Merz et al., 2018; Mingione, Kashif, & Petrescu, 2020; Omar et al., 2020; Pongsakornrunsilp & Schroeder, 2011; Popp & Woratschek, 2016; Ripoll González & Gale, 2020; Roncha & Radclyffe-Thomas, 2016; Rosenthal & Brito, 2017; Roy et al., 2019; Samuel et al., 2018; Saraniemi, 2011; Sarkar & Banerjee, 2019; Schmeltz & Kjeldsen, 2019; Seifert & Kwon, 2020; Shao et al., 2015; Shen et al., 2018; Sigala, 2018; Sorensen & Drennan, 2017; Suomi et al., 2020; Swaminathan et al., 2020; Tajvidi et al., 2020; Taks et al., 2020; Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach, 2018; Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013; Veloutsou & Black, 2020; von Wallpach et al., 2017; Yazicioglu & Borak, 2012; Yu et al., 2021; Zhang, Kandampully, & Bilgihan, 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A customer discussing the brand with other customers, friends and family and other networks (France et al., 2015)</li> </ul>
Influencing without interaction (B2C, B2B, C2B or C2C)	76 Articles (51%)	Aal et al., 2016; Aitken & Campelo, 2011; Anker et al., 2012; Ballantyne & Aitken, 2007; Black & Veloutsou, 2017; Boyle, 2007; Brodie, 2017; Brodie & Benson-Rea, 2016; Busser & Shulga, 2019; Cassia & Magno, 2019; Centeno & Wang, 2017; Chang et al., 2018; Cheung et al., 2020; Conejo & Wooliscroft, 2015; Christodoulides et al., 2011; Dean et al., 2016; Fujita et al., 2019; González-Mansilla et al., 2019; Green et al., 2018; Grenni et al., 2020; Grohs et al., 2020; Hajli et al., 2017; Hanna & Rowley, 2015; Hatch, 2012; Iglesias et al., 2020; Ind et al., 2020; Jeanes, 2013; Jones, 2005; Kandampully et al., 2015; Koivisto & Mattila, 2020; Kristal et al., 2018; Källström & Hultman, 2019; Lee & Soon, 2017; Lloyd & Woodside, 2013; Lucarelli, 2019; Masiello et al., 2020; McLeay et al., 2019; Merz et al., 2009; Merz et al., 2018; Millspaugh & Kent, 2016; Mingione, Kashif, & Petrescu, 2020; Nobre & Ferreira, 2017; Oliveira & Panyik, 2015; Omar et al., 2020; Paraskevaidis & Weidenfeld, 2019; Pathak & Pathak-Shelat, 2017; Payne et al., 2009; Rajagopal, 2019; Rather et al., 2019; Ripoll González & Gale, 2020; Roy et al., 2019; Samuel et al., 2018; Sanz-Blas et al., 2019; Saraniemi, 2011; Sarkar & Banerjee, 2019; Schmeltz & Kjeldsen, 2019; Seifert & Kwon, 2020; Shao et al., 2015; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012; Stach, 2019; Starr & Brodie, 2016; Stiehler, 2016; Swaminathan et al., 2020; Thomas, 2018; Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013; Veloutsou & Black, 2020; von Wallpach et al., 2017; Voyer et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2019; Yazicioglu & Borak, 2012; Yu et al., 2021; Zhang, Jiang, Shabbir, & Du, 2015; Zhang, Kandampully, & Bilgihan, 2015; Üçok Hughes et al., 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer communicates/acts on brand (Payne et al., 2009)</li> <li>• Marketer influences stakeholders' perceptions of brand meaning (Fujita et al., 2019); brand value (Merz et al., 2009) or brand identity (Iglesias et al., 2020)</li> <li>• Brand meaning creation/destruction by stakeholders (Green et al., 2018; Kristal et al., 2018)</li> <li>• User-generated content influencing non-participant members (Koivisto &amp; Mattila, 2020)</li> </ul>

**Table 2**  
Proposals to measure occurrence of co-creation.

Perspective	What is measured	Construct	Example items/proposals
Marketer perspective	Perceived interaction (B2C)	Customer value co-creation (Chang et al., 2018)	“The customers and our company deal with problems that arise in the course of the relationship together”
		Value co-creation (He et al., 2018)	“When some unexpected situation arises, my company and the supplier can work out a new deal”
		Value co-creation (Zhang, Jiang, Shabbir, & Du, 2015)	“Customers and our company deal with problems that arise in the course of the relationship together”
Stakeholder perspective	Willingness to interact/influence (C2B)	Perceived co-creation (Christodoulides et al., 2012)	“I enjoy creating online content about [x]” “I want to be able to have online dialogue with [x]”
	Willingness to interact (C2C)	Customer co-creation (Rather et al., 2019)	“I am interested in participating in this co-creation experience”
		Brand co-creation (Tajvidi et al., 2020)	“I am willing to provide my experiences and suggestions when my friends on my favorite social networking site want my advice on buying something from a brand”
		Co-creation (Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014)	“I am actively involved when [x] develops new solutions for me”
	Perceived interaction (C2B)	Value co-creation engagement attitude (Seifert & Kwon, 2020)	“I have been friendly to the brand on SNSs”
		Co-creation attitudes (Ahn et al., 2019)	“I like to interact with service providers to share information”
		Co-creation behavior (Ahn et al., 2019)	“If I have a useful idea on how to improve service, I let the employee know”
		Co-creation behavior (Lee et al., 2017; Omar et al., 2020)	“When I experience a problem, I let the employee know about it.”
		Co-creation behavior (Lee et al., 2017)	“I said positive things about XYZ and the employee to others”
	Perceived interaction (C2C)	Co-creation behavior (Omar et al., 2020)	“I say positive things about the retailer services and the retailer to others”
Co-created brand experience (Merrilees & Miller, 2019)		Shopping with family/friends rather than alone measured as experience co-creation	
Co-creation (Cheung et al., 2020)		“I often find solutions to my problems together with brand” “I often express my personal needs to brand”	
Perceived interaction and influencing without interaction (C2B, C2C)	Customer brand co-creation behavior (France et al., 2018)	“I take photos of myself with the brand and share them with the brand and others”	
	Value co-creation (González-Mansilla et al., 2019)	“[The firm] communicates with and listens to guests in order to improve its service.”	
	Value co-creation (Sanz-Blas et al., 2019)	Measured as intensity level of users’ participation in digital brand community (e.g., posting content/comments)	
	Brand value co-creation (Wang et al., 2020)	“I frequently upload product-related videos, audios, pictures, or images from my favorite Facebook brand page on my own Facebook page”	
	Brand meaning co-creation (Rossolatos, 2019)	Qualitative laddering technique to identify stakeholder-initiated interaction and influencing	
Value co-creation engagement behavior (Seifert & Kwon, 2020)	“On SNSs, I have assisted other people if they need my help about the brand” “When I had a good experience with the brand, I have commented about it on SNSs”		

behaviors. Nysveen and Pedersen (2014) concentrate on interaction for mutual problem solving between a firm and its customers from a customer perspective as a means of assessment. Seifert and Kwon (2020) consider brand value co-creation as indicative of customers' attitudes during interactions with a brand. Similarly, Ahn et al. (2019) measure brand value co-creation as attitudes toward interaction, knowledge sharing, and responsiveness, as well as co-creation behavior, including participation and citizenship behavior. Focusing on *perceived interaction* (C2C), Merrilees and Miller (2019) approach co-creation in branding by assessing brand experience while shopping alone (i.e., non-co-created experience) versus shopping with family or friends (i.e., co-created experience); thus, the act of shopping together is viewed as co-creation. Lee et al. (2017) and Omar et al. (2020) measure co-creation behavior, focusing on both C2B and C2C interactions, including information seeking and sharing, responsible behavior, personal interaction, feedback, advocacy, helping, and tolerance.

Seven proposals focus on *both stakeholder-perceived interaction and influencing without interaction*, with an emphasis on stakeholder behavior. González-Mansilla et al. (2019) measure customer-perceived value co-creation, accentuating dialogue, access, risk, and transparency. France et al. (2018) highlight behaviors, such as direct participation in brand development, giving feedback, advocacy, and helping peers, as indicators of the degree to which co-creation occurs. Comparatively, in an online consumer context, Sanz-Blas et al. (2019) measure value co-creation through the intensity of brand community members' participation (e.g., posting content, writing comments). In the context of consumer behaviors on social network sites (SNSs), Cheung et al. (2020), Seifert and Kwon (2020), and Wang et al. (2020) suggest similar value and brand value co-creation measures, implying both interaction and influencing without interaction when consumers act as brand endorsers (C2B), advocates (C2C), or developers (C2B), among others. Finally, as a qualitative assessment method, a laddering technique is suggested (Rossolatos, 2019) to identify stakeholder-initiated interaction and influencing, leading to co-created brand meaning on social media platforms.

Overall, these proposals on how to measure the occurrence of co-creation deal with either marketer or stakeholder perceptions of *interaction* with or *influence* on the corresponding party. The identified studies do not focus on assessing co-creation influences on both parties.

The next section addresses the roles of the marketer and various stakeholders in co-creation.

#### 4.2. Theme 2: Who initiates and who participates in co-creation?

The review reveals that co-creation is perceived as either marketer-initiated, focusing on stakeholder involvement in branding activities, or stakeholder-initiated, concentrating on stakeholder-to-marketer or stakeholder-to-stakeholder interactions and influencing. A third approach is also identified, where the marketer is viewed as a facilitator of stakeholder interactions and brand-related influencing, for example, in firm-created brand communities.

The articles generally discuss co-creation through a multi-stakeholder approach, acknowledging consumers, managers, employees, suppliers, distribution partners, media, competitors, non-government organizations, governments, and the public (Jones, 2005). Hatch and Schultz (2010) further argue for a full-stakeholder perspective in which any stakeholder relevant to the marketer may be considered a potential co-creator, such as a customer's customer.

Regarding empirical multi-stakeholder approaches, some studies have analyzed the dynamics and dialogue among stakeholders, such as managers, clients, organizational members, and partner institutions (Aspara et al., 2014; Iglesias et al., 2020; Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach, 2018; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013). Other studies have focused on specific stakeholders, such as consumers and customers (Cova et al., 2015; France et al., 2018), managers (Kennedy & Guzmán, 2016), employees (Dean et al., 2016; Schmeltz & Kjeldsen, 2019), and business

partners (Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018).

As noted by Fisher and Smith (2011, pp. 326–327), the role of the marketer versus that of stakeholders in co-creation may not necessarily be equal: “There seem to be few relationships that are actually equal in strength, interest, and input for all parties involved. A very small number of relationships likely match this ideal state of mutual reciprocity. This means that co-creation will likely be more asymmetric, sometimes skewed in the direction of the ‘producer’ and other times in the direction of the ‘consumer’” (pp. 326–327). With this asymmetry in mind, variations can be identified in perspectives on the roles of the marketer and stakeholders in co-creation. The three emerging themes are presented in the next section and summarized in Table 3.

##### 4.2.1. The marketer as initiator of co-creation

This approach emphasizes stakeholders' participation in *marketer-initiated* branding processes that involve direct and purposeful interactions between both parties (37% of the articles).

Various stakeholders, including business partners (Hanna & Rowley, 2015; Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018) or customers (Cassia & Magno, 2019; Kandampully et al., 2015), may participate in marketer-initiated co-creation interaction. At a strategic level, marketers may initiate co-creation by involving stakeholders directly in a branding strategy (Cassia & Magno, 2019; Chang et al., 2018; Lindstedt, 2015; Ind et al., 2017) or in marketers' rebranding processes (Aspara et al., 2014; Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach, 2018). Stakeholders' roles can be marketer-assigned, as an external brand specialist or a referee, or proactively adopted, as a knowledge provider or an advocate (Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018). At the operational level, brand value is suggested as emerging and developing in co-creation interactions between employees and customers in the contexts of luxury service (Choi et al., 2016), tourism (Lee et al., 2017), and household services (Glanfield et al., 2018). Furthermore, marketers may initiate co-creation when asking for stakeholder feedback regarding their brands (Kennedy, 2017; Kennedy & Guzmán, 2017) or welcoming ideas for new brand names (Juntunen, 2012; Kim et al., 2018). In an online context, marketers may initiate co-creation by involving stakeholders in creating branded content (Fujita et al., 2019) or by creating platforms, such as brand websites (Alden et al., 2016), social media accounts (Busser & Shulga, 2019; Rosenthal & Brito, 2017; Mingione, Cristofaro, & Mondì, 2020), or digital applications (Choi et al., 2016; Roy et al., 2019), where stakeholders are invited to comment on specific issues.

It is suggested that marketers benefit from initiating co-creation through its potentials for obtaining information about stakeholders (Millspaugh & Kent, 2016) and for achieving mutually beneficial outcomes (Kandampully et al., 2015). Marketers' co-creative efforts may also lead to mutual benefits if stakeholders are motivated to participate in co-creation due to brand commitment (Glanfield et al., 2018) or their own creative interests (Ind et al., 2013). However, the results of marketer-initiated approaches are not mutually beneficial in all cases (Aspara et al., 2014; Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach, 2018). For example, in the study of Aspara et al. (2014), stakeholders in higher education expressed resistance against a marketer-initiated co-creative rebranding process, and the stakeholders' heterogeneous interpretations led to undermining the brand's essence.

In conclusion, marketer-initiated co-creation interactions occur at both strategic and operational levels (i.e., branding activities) in offline and online contexts. Marketer-initiated co-creation may have benefits for marketers or participants, but the results may not be mutually beneficial.

##### 4.2.2. The stakeholder as initiator of co-creation

Overall, 47% of the articles propose *stakeholders as initiators* of co-creation interaction or influencing. When stakeholders initiate co-creation, marketers may or may not participate in the process. According to France et al. (2015), “customer brand co-creation behaviors are the customer-led interactions between the customer and the brand” (p.



**Table 3**  
Perspectives on marketer and stakeholder initiation of co-creation.

Perspective	Freq.	References	Examples
Marketer as initiator of co-creation	55 articles (37%)	Ahn et al., 2019; Alden et al., 2016; Aspara et al., 2014; Busser & Shulga, 2019; Cassia & Magno, 2019; Chang et al., 2018; Cheung et al., 2020; Choi et al., 2016; Cova et al., 2015; Essamri et al., 2019; Fujita et al., 2019; Glanfield et al., 2018; González-Mansilla et al., 2019; Hanna & Rowley, 2015; He et al., 2018; Iglesias et al., 2020; Ind et al., 2013; Ind et al., 2017; Ind et al., 2020; Juntunen, 2012; Kandampully et al., 2015; Kennedy, 2017; Kennedy & Guzmán, 2017; Lee et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2018; Lindstedt, 2015; Masiello et al., 2020; Merrilees, 2016; Millsbaugh & Kent, 2016; Mingione & Leoni, 2020; Mingione, Cristofaro, & Mondì, 2020; Mingione, Kashif, & Petrescu, 2020; Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014; Omar et al., 2020; Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016; Rather et al., 2019; Rosenthal & Brito, 2017; Roy et al., 2019; Sarkar & Banerjee, 2019; Scandeliuss & Cohen, 2016; Schmeltz & Kjeldsen, 2019; Skålén et al., 2015; Solem, 2016; Spry et al., 2018; Suomi et al., 2020; Swaminathan et al., 2020; Taks et al., 2020; Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach, 2018; Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2018; Veloutsou & Black, 2020; Williams et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2021; Zhang, Jiang, Shabbir, & Du, 2015; Zhang, Kandampully, & Bilgihan, 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marketer-invited input in brand development (Törmälä &amp; Saraniemi, 2018)</li> <li>• Marketer-prompted feedback (Kennedy &amp; Guzmán, 2017)</li> <li>• Marketers' websites/SoMe pages (Alden et al., 2016; Cheung et al., 2020; Rosenthal &amp; Brito 2017; Roy et al., 2019)</li> <li>• Co-inventing brand name (Juntunen, 2012)</li> </ul>
Stakeholder as initiator of co-creation	69 articles (47%)	Ahn et al., 2019; Ballantyne & Aitken, 2007; Bento et al., 2018; Bertschy et al., 2020; Black & Veloutsou, 2017; Brodie, 2017; Brodie et al., 2013; Carlson et al., 2019; Centeno & Wang, 2017; Chiang et al., 2017; Christodoulides et al., 2011; Christodoulides et al., 2012; Cova & Paraque, 2016; Davari et al., 2017; Essamri et al., 2019; Fisher & Smith, 2011; France et al., 2015; France et al., 2018; Gambetti et al., 2016; Gambetti & Graffigna, 2015; Green et al., 2018; Hajli et al., 2017; Hanna & Rowley, 2015; Hatch, 2012; He et al., 2018; Healy & McDonagh, 2013; Hollebeek et al., 2017; Kaufmann et al., 2016; Kristal et al., 2018; Kucharska, 2019; Lee & Soon, 2017; Lin et al., 2018; Lloyd and Woodside, 2013; Lucarelli, 2019; Luo et al., 2019; Merrilees, 2016; Merrilees & Miller, 2019; Merz et al., 2009; Mingione, Kashif, & Petrescu, 2020; Nobre & Ferreira, 2017; Oliveira & Panyik, 2015; Paraskevaidis & Weidenfeld, 2019; Payne et al., 2009; Pongsakornrunsilp & Schroeder, 2011; Popp & Woratschek, 2016; Rajagopal, 2019; Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016; Rather et al., 2019; Roncha & Radclyffe-Thomas, 2016; Rosenthal & Brito, 2017; Rossolatos, 2019; Samuel et al., 2018; Sanz-Blas et al., 2019; Saraniemi, 2011; Schmeltz & Kjeldsen, 2019; Seifert & Kwon, 2020; Shen et al., 2018; Sorensen & Drennan, 2017; Spry et al., 2018; Stach, 2019; Stiehler, 2016; Swaminathan et al., 2020; Tajvidi et al., 2020; Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach, 2018; Thomas, 2018; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2018; Yazicioğlu & Borak, 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer-led interactions (France et al., 2015; France et al., 2018)</li> <li>• Brand resurrection movements (Davari et al. 2017)</li> <li>• Stakeholder-created brand communities (Brodie et al., 2013; Gambetti &amp; Graffigna, 2015; Hajli et al., 2017; Kucharska, 2019; Lee &amp; Soon, 2017; Nobre &amp; Ferreira, 2017; Pongsakornrunsilp &amp; Schroeder, 2011; Thomas, 2018; Yazicioğlu &amp; Borak, 2012)</li> </ul>
Marketer as facilitator of co-creation	78 articles (53%)	Aal et al., 2016; Aitken & Campelo, 2011; Alden et al., 2016; Anker et al., 2012; Ballantyne & Aitken, 2007; Berthon et al., 2009; Biraghi & Gambetti, 2017; Boyle, 2007; Brodie & Benson-Rea, 2016; Brodie et al., 2006; Brodie et al., 2017; Busser & Shulga, 2019; Cheung et al., 2020; Christodoulides et al., 2011; Christodoulides et al., 2012; Conejo & Wooliscroft, 2015; Cova et al., 2015; Dean et al., 2016; Fisher & Smith, 2011; Gambetti & Graffigna, 2015; González-Mansilla et al., 2019; Green et al., 2016; Grenni et al., 2020; Grohs et al., 2020; Gyrd-Jones & Kornum 2013; Hakala & Lemmetyinen, 2011; Hanna & Rowley, 2015; Hatch, 2012; Hatch & Schultz, 2010; Iglesias et al., 2013; Iglesias et al., 2020; Ind et al., 2013; Ind et al., 2020; Jeanes, 2013; Jones, 2005; Kandampully et al., 2015; Kennedy & Guzmán, 2016; Kim et al., 2018; Koivisto & Mattila, 2020; Kucharska, 2019; Källström & Hultman, 2019; Masiello et al., 2020; McLeay et al., 2019; Merz et al., 2009; Mingione, Kashif, & Petrescu, 2020; Mingione & Leoni, 2020; Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014; Oliveira & Panyik, 2015; Paraskevaidis & Weidenfeld, 2019; Pathak & Pathak-Shelat, 2017; Payne et al., 2009; Ripoll González & Gale, 2020; Roncha & Radclyffe-Thomas, 2016; Saha et al., 2020; Sarkar & Banerjee, 2019; Schmeltz & Kjeldsen, 2019; Seljeseth & Korneliusen, 2015; Shao et al., 2015; Sigala, 2018; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012; Skålén et al., 2015; Sorensen & Drennan, 2017; Starr & Brodie, 2016; Suomi et al., 2020; Swaminathan et al., 2020; Tajvidi et al., 2020; Taks et al., 2020; Tynan et al., 2010; Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018; Veloutsou & Black, 2020; Vollero et al., 2019; Von Wallpach et al., 2017; Voyer et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2021; Zhang, Kandampully, & Bilgihan, 2015; Üçok Hughes et al., 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marketer is open to emerging stakeholder influences (Iglesias et al., 2013)</li> <li>• Marketer invites interaction through transparency/access (Hatch &amp; Schultz, 2010)</li> <li>• Marketer-created brand communities (Conejo &amp; Wooliscroft, 2015; Cova et al., 2015; Ind et al., 2020; Shao et al., 2015; Skålén et al., 2015; Suomi et al., 2020)</li> <li>• Marketer protects core identity attributes, and negotiates peripheral brand identity attributes (Gyrd-Jones &amp; Kornum, 2013)</li> <li>• Marketer processes stakeholder-created brand narratives (Singh &amp; Sonnenburg, 2012)</li> </ul>

852) and therefore include a range of behaviors that customers willingly and purposefully demonstrate by volunteering feedback to the marketer or discussing brands with peers. Stakeholder-initiated co-creation may also include brand resurrection movements on social media, where consumers attempt to influence marketers in bringing back defunct brands (Davari et al., 2017).

Stakeholder-created brand communities reflect various individuals' motivations to participate in dialogues about brands (Pongsakornrungrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011). The explored contexts include football fan communities (Bertschy et al., 2020; Pongsakornrungrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011; Thomas, 2018), other sports brand communities (Brodie et al., 2013; Popp & Woratschek, 2016), and gaming communities (Nobre & Ferreira, 2017), as well as the following brand communities: Indiana Jones (Fisher & Smith, 2011), soft drinks (Gambetti & Graffigna, 2015); TOMS footwear (Roncha & Radclyffe-Thomas, 2016), Apple (Lee & Soon, 2017), and electronics (Hajli et al., 2017). Fisher and Smith (2011) stress that stakeholder interactions in brand communities typically occur beyond managerial intervention or control. Thomas (2018) suggests that engaged brand community members may even completely reject the idea of co-creation with a marketer, as it may be a disruptive or an intrusive process that clashes with the stakeholders' own meaning making.

The articles in this category take a particular interest in online brand contexts, although co-creation may occur either online or offline across various touchpoints (Gyrd-Jones & Kornum, 2013). Furthermore, consumers and customers are the primary focus of such articles, while other stakeholders are scarcely considered.

#### 4.2.3. The marketer as facilitator of co-creation

This category suggests that stakeholder interactions and influences are facilitated by the marketer and then recognized in the latter's branding approaches (53% of the articles). The marketer relinquishes control by enabling stakeholders to engage with the brand and increasingly considering their input. Iglesias et al. (2013) advocate an 'organic' view of the brand, based on co-creation, suggesting that managers may adopt a humble approach by remaining open to consumer influences in branding strategies. According to Hatch and Schultz (2010), marketers may encourage stakeholders to interact with them and with one another by increasing transparency and access to co-creation platforms. Such initiatives include firm-created brand communities encouraging stakeholder participation and engagement (Cova et al., 2015; Ind et al., 2020; Shao et al., 2015; Skälén et al., 2015), which resemble stakeholder-created brand communities to the extent that stakeholders interact freely without direct marketer prompts, while the marketer retains administrative rights to the platform. The marketer may also act as a discussion moderator (Ind et al., 2020). Arguing against the notion that facilitating brand community creation leads to diluted managerial control, Suomi et al. (2020) claim that the brand will even benefit from this practice if its message retains a "profound symbolic meaning" that unites community members and evokes a "sense of belonging and gratitude" (p. 218). In internal branding, Jeanes (2013) and Dean et al. (2016) highlight the marketers' role in encouraging employees to interpret the brand or express themselves through it.

An acknowledged issue associated with marketer-facilitated co-creation is whether encouraging stakeholder engagement with brands increases the risk of reputational damage (Hatch & Schultz, 2010; Swaminathan et al., 2020). Thus, researchers have discussed how stakeholder influences may be monitored to 'protect' the brand. Gyrd-Jones and Kornum (2013) contend that managers may protect core-brand identity attributes, which are non-negotiable from the marketer's point of view, and negotiate peripheral brand identity attributes—essentially considering complex sub-cultures of the stakeholder ecosystem but to a limited extent. Through a brand community approach, Conejo and Wooliscroft (2015) maintain that when brand managers administrate a co-creation space, they "should only adopt enough consumer culture to keep the brand interesting and relevant" (p.

294). Through a brand narrative approach, Singh and Sonnenburg (2012) view stakeholders as storytellers and marketers as 'processors' of these stories in relation to their original 'script'. The authors state that "it is in the brand owner's interest to bind the processed stories of the different participants as close to the basic script as possible because the closer the stories correspond with the script, the easier it is for the brand owner to navigate the brand narrative and its co-creation toward a more universal perception and meaning" (p. 193).

In conclusion, proponents of 'marketer-as-facilitator' approaches argue that the marketer's roles in co-creation are to remain open to emerging stakeholder influences, negotiate brand identity attributes, and facilitate dialogue and access to co-creation platforms.

#### 4.3. Theme 3: What is co-created and for whom?

This review identifies the multiplicity of conceptual outcomes of co-creation in branding. As Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2016) propose, outcomes of co-creation can be perceived as subjective from the perspective of the beneficiary (i.e., a marketer or a stakeholder); thus, there are varying views on what is co-created and for whom. However, the range of concepts is broad, not to mention the lack of consensus on the definitions of the concepts themselves. As a result, the theory displays *no single interpretation of what various stakeholders co-create nor of the co-creation's locus*. Therefore, this part of the review is an overview of the used concepts, reflecting potential outcomes of co-creation. The concepts are presented in order of frequency (%), starting from the most used concepts.

Both Table 4 and Fig. 4 outline the conceptual landscape. To illustrate conceptual multiplicity, co-creation platforms are separated into three spheres, in line with the distinctions made by Grönroos and Voima (2013): the provider (marketer), the customer (stakeholder), and the joint spheres. Since co-creation may have multiple outcomes that are not necessarily shared (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016), this framework is used to distinguish between individual and mutual outcomes of co-creation. In the marketer sphere, marketer-specific outcomes are created, such as branding strategy from the marketer's (the sender's) point of view. In the stakeholder sphere, the stakeholder (the receiver) creates individual and subjective outcomes, such as brand images and brand experiences. In the joint sphere, interaction and influencing between the marketer and the stakeholder occur, and the reviewed articles propose that the parties co-create mutual outcomes, such as shared brand value, shared brand meaning, and a shared brand identity.

The identified concepts are presented next.

##### 4.3.1. The marketer sphere: Proposed conceptual outcomes

The following co-created, branding-related outcomes in the marketer sphere are identified: branding strategy, brand identity, brand promise/value proposition, brand narrative, brand culture, and brand nomenclature. All these concepts are traditionally considered marketer-focused.

Co-creation of *branding strategy* (4.7% of the articles) implies stakeholders' active participation in designing a branding strategy (Ind et al., 2017; Lindstedt, 2015; Mingione, Cristofaro, & Mondì, 2020; Oliveira & Panyik, 2015; Taks et al., 2020; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2018). From a marketer perspective, Essamri et al. (2019) and Spry et al. (2018) further suggest that *brand identity* (3.4%) may also be co-created in management-led processes, as the marketer partners with stakeholders by seeking their feedback. Several articles (2.7%) also discuss the co-creation of *brand promises* or the *brand value proposition*. According to Anker et al. (2012), a brand promise is co-created when one that is made by the marketer is fulfilled in the eyes of a customer. Similarly, Starr and Brodie (2016) suggest that co-creation of the brand value proposition occurs when the marketer certifies (i.e., formally gives the brand certain attributes) and the stakeholder authenticates the brand (i.e., perceives the brand as genuine based on a particular set of standards). Moreover, the concept of co-created *brand nomenclature* (2.7%) emphasizes that

**Table 4**  
Conceptual landscape used in the reviewed articles.

Sphere	What is co-created	Frequency	References
Marketer sphere	Branding strategy	7 (4.0%)	Hakala & Lemmetyinen, 2011; Ind et al., 2017; Lindstedt, 2015; Mingione, Kashif, & Petrescu, 2020; Oliveira & Panyik, 2015; Taks et al., 2020; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2018
	Brand identity	5 (3.4%)	Essamri et al., 2019; Hakala & Lemmetyinen, 2011; Masiello et al., 2020; Millsbaugh & Kent, 2016; Spry et al., 2018
	Brand nomenclature	4 (2.7%)	Boyle, 2007; Juntunen, 2012; Kim et al., 2018; Scandeliuss & Cohen, 2016
	Brand promise/value proposition	4 (2.7%)	Anker et al., 2012; Källström & Hultman, 2019; Starr & Brodie, 2016; Williams et al., 2019
	Brand narrative	2 (1.4%)	Alden et al., 2016; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012
	Branded content	1 (0.7%)	Fujita et al., 2019
	Brand culture	1 (0.7%)	Jeanes, 2013
Stakeholder sphere	Brand experience/experience value	19 (12.8%)	Ahn et al., 2019; Brodie et al., 2006; Cheung et al., 2020; Gambetti et al., 2016; Luo et al., 2019; McLeay et al., 2019; Merrilees, 2016; Merrilees & Miller, 2019; Mingione, Kashif, & Petrescu, 2020; Nobre & Ferreira, 2017; Omar et al., 2020; Paraskevaidis & Weidenfeld, 2019; Payne et al., 2009; Seljeseth & Korneliusen, 2015; Sigala, 2018; Swaminathan et al., 2020; Tynan et al., 2010; Williams et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2021
	Brand image	4 (2.7%)	Aitken & Campelo, 2011; Hatch, 2012; Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018; Üçok Hughes et al., 2016
	Branded content	2 (1.4%)	Gambetti et al., 2016; Koivisto & Mattila, 2020
	Stakeholder value in branding contexts	2 (1.4%)	Millsbaugh & Kent, 2016; Sorensen & Drennan, 2017
	Brand community identity	2 (1.4%)	Black & Veloutsou, 2017; Hollebeek et al. 2017
	Brand community value	1 (0.7%)	Sanz-Blas et al., 2019
	Brand intimacy	1 (0.7%)	Ind et al., 2013
Joint sphere	Brand rapture	1 (0.7%)	Lloyd and Woodside, 2013
	Value in branding contexts	43 (29.0%)	Bento et al., 2018; Brodie et al., 2006; Brodie et al., 2013; Busser & Shulga, 2019; Carlson et al., 2019; Cassia & Magno, 2019; Chang et al., 2018; Chiang et al., 2017; Christodoulides et al., 2012; Cova et al., 2015; Cova & Paraque, 2016; Fisher & Smith, 2011; Glanfield et al., 2018; González-Mansilla et al., 2019; Grohs et al., 2020; Hajli et al., 2017; He et al., 2018; Healy & McDonagh, 2013; Ind et al., 2013; Ind et al., 2020; Kandampully et al., 2015; Källström & Hultman, 2019; Lee & Soon, 2017; Lee et al., 2017; Luo et al., 2019; Merrilees, 2016; Mingione & Leoni, 2020; Nobre & Ferreira, 2017; Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014; Omar et al., 2020; Payne et al., 2009; Pongsakornrungrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011; Popp & Woratschek, 2016; Rather et al., 2019; Samuel et al., 2018; Shen et al., 2018; Sigala, 2018; Skälén et al., 2015; Solem, 2016; Sorensen & Drennan, 2017; Thomas, 2018; Zhang, Jiang, Shabbir, & Du, 2015; Zhang, Kandampully, & Bilgihan, 2015
	Brand value	35 (23.6%)	Aal et al., 2016; Bertschy et al., 2020; Biraghi & Gambetti, 2017; Cheung et al., 2020; Choi et al., 2016; Christodoulides et al., 2011; Davari et al., 2017; France et al., 2015; France et al., 2018; Gambetti & Graffigna 2015; Hatch & Schultz, 2010; Iglesias et al., 2013; Jones, 2005; Kaufmann et al., 2016; Kennedy, 2017; Kucharska, 2019; Lin et al., 2018; Merz et al., 2009; Merz et al., 2018; Mingione, Cristofaro, & Mondini, 2020; Mingione, Kashif, & Petrescu, 2020; Rajagopal, 2019; Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016; Roy et al., 2019; Saha et al., 2020; Sarkar & Banerjee, 2019; Seifert & Kwon, 2020; Swaminathan et al., 2020; Tajvidi et al., 2020; Tynan et al., 2010; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2018; Veloutsou & Black, 2020; Vollero et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2021
	Brand meaning	30 (20.3%)	Aitken & Campelo, 2011; Ballantyne & Aitken, 2007; Berthon et al., 2009; Bertschy et al., 2020; Brodie, 2017; Brodie & Benson-Rea, 2016; Brodie et al., 2017; Conejo & Wooliscroft, 2015; Dean et al., 2016; Fujita et al., 2019; Green et al., 2016; Green et al., 2018; Grohs et al., 2020; Hanna & Rowley, 2015; Hatch, 2012; Hatch & Schultz, 2010; Kristal et al., 2018; Masiello et al., 2020; Rosenthal & Brito, 2017; Rossolatos, 2019; Schmeltz & Kjeldsen, 2019; Shao et al., 2015; Stach, 2019; Stiehler, 2016; Suomi et al., 2020; Swaminathan et al., 2020; Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach, 2018; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013; Veloutsou & Black, 2020; Yazicioğlu & Borak, 2012
Brand identity	18 (12.2%)	Aspara et al., 2014; Black & Veloutsou 2017; Brodie, 2017; Brodie et al., 2017; Centeno & Wang, 2017; Dean et al., 2016; Grenni et al., 2020; Gyrd-Jones & Kornum, 2013; Iglesias et al., 2020; Kennedy & Guzmán, 2016; Lucarelli, 2019; Pathak & Pathak-Shelat, 2017; Ripoll González & Gale, 2020; Roncha & Radclyffe-Thomas, 2016; Saraniemi, 2011; Suomi et al., 2020; von Wallpach et al., 2017; Voyer et al., 2017	

**The marketer sphere as the locus:**  
Potential outcomes for the marketer

**The joint sphere as the locus:**  
Potential mutual outcomes

**The stakeholder sphere as the locus:**  
Potential outcomes for stakeholders

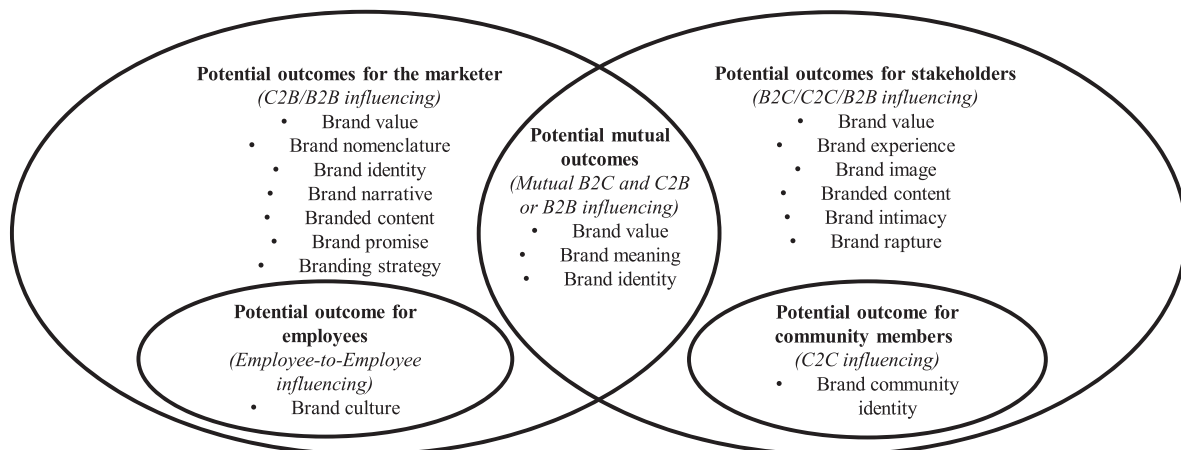


Fig. 4. Overview of the identified conceptual outcomes of co-creation.

marketers may involve stakeholders in the creation of brand names, logos, and communication materials (Juntunen, 2012; Kim et al., 2018; Scandeliu & Cohen, 2016). In this case, the brand is treated as a marketer-managed entity, not a mental representation (Stern, 2006). From a storytelling perspective, the co-creation of *brand narratives* (1.4%) is discussed, emphasizing the customers' role in contributing to the company-narrated brand story with specific narrative-supporting actions and inputs (Alden et al., 2016; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). The review also identifies *branded content* (0.7%) as a potential outcome of firm-initiated co-creation. Finally, co-created *brand culture* (0.7%) describes employees' self-expression via the brand from an internal organizational perspective (Jeanes, 2013).

#### 4.3.2. The stakeholder sphere: Proposed conceptual outcomes

The stakeholder sphere—external to the marketer's view—is the locus for the following co-created concepts: brand experience, brand image, branded content, brand community identity, brand intimacy, and brand rapture.

Co-created *brand experience* or *brand experience value* (12.8% of the articles) is considered an outcome for the stakeholder (Ahn et al., 2019; McLeay et al., 2019; Paraskevadis & Weidenfeld, 2019; Payne et al., 2009; Seljeseth & Korneliussen, 2015; Tynan et al., 2010). Payne et al. (2009) and Tynan et al. (2010) propose that brand experiences may result from marketer–stakeholder interactions, such as branded service encounters where boundaries between production and consumption are blurred. Brand image (2.7%) is suggested as co-created. Here, brand images are perceived as stakeholders' collectively constructed and shared understandings (Törmälä & Saraniemi, 2018; Üçok Hughes et al., 2016). In this case, the concepts of brand image and brand meaning are used similarly (Berthon et al., 2009), discussed as a shared outcome of co-creation in the reviewed articles. As suggested by Gambetti et al. (2016) and Koivisto and Mattila (2020), stakeholders may co-create *branded content* (1.4%) that references a brand through processes in which the marketer is not directly involved. From a social identity perspective, co-creation may also influence individuals' identities, as well as *brand community identities* (1.4%), suggesting that individuals in a brand community co-create its identity (Black & Veloutsou, 2017; Hollebeek et al., 2017). From a stakeholder viewpoint, Millsbaugh and Kent (2016), as well as Sorensen and Drennan (2017), claim that *stakeholder value* (1.4%), which is unique to stakeholders, is an outcome of co-creation for stakeholders. Ind et al. (2013) argue that *brand intimacy* (0.7%) serves as an emotional outcome of co-creation from an individual stakeholder perspective, describing how close stakeholders

feel to a brand after a specific co-creation event. Comparably, yet from a collective and more intense perspective, Lloyd and Woodside (2013) introduce co-created *brand rapture* (0.7%) as a metaphorical concept, shaped by the “brand's most devoted stakeholders” (p. 472), thus reflecting an ultimate form of brand attraction.

#### 4.3.3. The joint sphere: Proposed conceptual outcomes

The joint sphere of co-creation, where co-creation is proposed to have mutual outcomes for both the marketer and stakeholders, is the locus for the following concepts – value, brand value, brand meaning, and brand identity. A majority (78.4%) of the reviewed articles use this type of terminology, suggesting that co-creation may lead to mutual understandings.

Some reviewed articles use the concept of *value co-creation* (29.0%) as discussed in the service literature but applied to branding contexts. These articles typically refer to perspectives within the service-dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) or the service logic (Grönroos & Voima, 2013), especially in the context of brand communities (Bento et al., 2018; Chiang et al., 2017; Cova & Paraque, 2016; Hajli et al., 2017; Healy & McDonagh, 2013; Samuel et al., 2018; Sorensen & Drennan, 2017). Scholars have also discussed the impacts of value co-creation on brand equity (Christodoulides et al., 2012; Omar et al., 2020; Zhang, Jiang, Shabbir, & Du, 2015), brand loyalty (Kandampully et al., 2015; Luo et al., 2019; Solem, 2016), and brand experience (Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014). Others have discussed brand-related antecedents of value co-creation, including brand experience (Merrilees, 2016), brand commitment (Glanfield et al., 2018), and brand orientation (Chang et al., 2018). The concept of co-created *brand value* (23.6%) is also derived from the service-dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) and has subsequently been developed in the branding literature to denote value that is solely attributable to a brand (Merz et al., 2018). It has been proposed that brand value is co-created through interaction among the marketer and its multiple stakeholders (Aal et al., 2016; Biraghi & Gambetti, 2017; Iglesias et al., 2013; Jones, 2005; Lin et al., 2018; Mingione & Leoni, 2020) and that it is created for both the marketer and customers (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016; Wang et al., 2020). However, Sarkar and Banerjee (2019) assert that brand value may be unique to the marketer or to the stakeholder. Hence, brand value may be in the joint sphere, the marketer sphere, or the stakeholder sphere (see Fig. 4). Tynan et al. (2010) suggest multiple types of brand value, including utilitarian, symbolic/expressive, experiential/hedonic, relational, and cost/sacrifice value. Additionally, Mingione, Cristofaro, and Mondini (2020) suggest emotional brand value as a potential outcome of co-

creation, proposing a formula for calculating an emotional co-creation score in a social media context.

Scholars also discuss the co-creation of *brand meaning* (20.3%), which represents a socially constructed concept. Co-created brand meaning implies that marketers’ and stakeholders’ perceptions, feelings, and opinions about a brand are ‘exchanged’ in interactions, resulting in a collective understanding of the brand (Ballantyne & Aitken, 2007; Brodie et al., 2017; Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach, 2018; Yazicioglu & Borak, 2012). However, brand meaning is not necessarily uniform among various parties (Bertschy et al., 2020). Berthon et al. (2009) specify that co-created, shared brand meaning requires a mutual knowledge base between the marketer and the stakeholders, while recognizing that stakeholders with divergent knowledge bases assign different meanings to a brand. When the marketer’s and the stakeholders’ perceptions are in congruence, brand meaning is understood to be, at least temporarily, shared (Berthon et al., 2009).

*Brand identity* (12.2%) is also regarded as co-created in a joint process. Brand identity, as traditionally defined by Aaker (1996), originates from the marketer. However, the co-creation literature suggests that brand identity may be dynamically co-created by absorbing and configuring opinions, inputs, influences, and identities of stakeholders (Black & Veloutsou, 2017; Centeno & Wang, 2017; Gyrd-Jones & Kornum, 2013; Kennedy & Guzmán, 2016; Lucarelli, 2019; Saraniemi, 2011; von Wallpach et al., 2017; Voyer et al., 2017). For instance, Iglesias et al. (2020) argue that “brand identity co-creation [...] is an ongoing dynamic process where multiple internal and external stakeholders engage in four different but interrelated performances: communicating; internalizing; contesting; and elucidating” (p. 32). Thus, a co-created brand identity leans more toward the joint sphere compared with how brand identity has traditionally been considered in branding.

In conclusion, the literature indicates that co-creation ranges from minor branding activities, such as naming a product, to the entire process of branding with multiple outcomes, such as brand identities and brand images. Notably, the conceptual multiplicity is flourishing, and the same concepts are used from many ontological perspectives.

An overview of the multiple conceptual outcomes of co-creation is illustrated in Fig. 4.

As a conclusion based on the literature review as a whole, co-creation is perceived as a process of interaction or influencing between a marketer and various stakeholders, and in some cases, internally among employees only or externally among stakeholders only. The reviewed articles have sought to measure co-creation from the perspective of the marketer or the stakeholders, not from the two parties’ perspectives in one study. The marketer or stakeholders may act as initiator(s) of co-creation, or the marketer may facilitate co-creation by encouraging stakeholder engagement. Co-creation has multiple potential conceptual outcomes, which may influence the marketer (marketer sphere), the

stakeholders (stakeholder sphere) or both parties mutually (joint sphere). Next, the review is summarized through a classification of different types of co-creation.

4.3.4. Summarizing the findings: Different types of co-creation in branding

As a summary (MacInnis, 2011) of the critical analysis, Table 5 presents a classification (Snyder, 2019) based on Theme 1, which identifies co-creation as interaction and influencing; Theme 2, which identifies what parties initiate and participate in co-creation; and Theme 3, which identifies potential outcomes of co-creation for various parties.

As the summarizing classification shows, Category (1) reflects the findings that report influencing without interaction between two parties. Categories (2) and (3) refer to co-creation in either the marketer or the stakeholder sphere, but the marketer and the stakeholders do not interact in the joint sphere. As examples, Category (2) includes internally initiated co-creation in an organization (Dean et al., 2016), while Category (3) includes stakeholder-initiated interactions in brand communities influencing other stakeholders (France et al., 2015), for example, by influencing a co-created brand community identity (Black & Veloutsou, 2017; Hollebeek et al., 2017).

Categories (4) and (5) reflect situations where either the marketer or the stakeholders initiate(s) co-creation, and both parties interact in the joint sphere. However, in both categories, co-creation is asymmetric. In Category (4), the interaction has outcomes for the marketer, for example, through the development of a co-created branding strategy or a new brand name. In Category (5), the interaction leads only to outcomes for stakeholders, such as new brand images, while the marketer does not develop new branding approaches.

Category (6) reflects symmetric co-creation where both the marketer and the stakeholders interact, and the process leads to co-created outcomes for both parties. Here, the initiator may be either the marketer or the stakeholder. For example, from a marketer perspective, co-creation may occur in marketer-hosted branding strategy workshops with invited stakeholders (Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2018), when both the marketer’s branding activities and the stakeholders’ perceptions of the brand are influenced. Co-creation may also occur in a stakeholder-initiated brand resurrection movement if it results in the firm reviving a brand (Davari et al., 2017). Furthermore, co-creation may occur as interactive discussions between stakeholders and firm representatives on social media, such as in a marketer-led or a stakeholder-led brand community, where both new directions for the brand and new stakeholder views of the brand emerge.

The study’s findings and contributions are discussed next.

5. Toward a conceptual understanding of co-creation in branding

The systematic search process identified 148 articles from 55

Table 5 Summarizing classification of co-creation.

Category	Interaction in the marketer sphere	Interaction in the joint sphere	Interaction in the stakeholder sphere	Influencing with outcomes for marketer’s branding	Influencing with mutual outcomes	Influencing with outcomes for stakeholders
(1) Influencing without interaction (no co-creation)				x	x	x
(2) Co-creation within the marketer’s sphere	x			x		
(3) Co-creation within the stakeholder’s sphere			x			x
(4) Co-creation within the joint sphere, with marketer-focused influences		x		x		
(5) Co-creation within the joint sphere, with stakeholder-focused influences		x				x
(6) Co-creation within the joint sphere, with influences for both the marketer’s branding and stakeholders’ perceptions of the brand, and/or mutual outcomes		x		x	x	x

academic journals, which were critically reviewed, outlining several implications for future conceptual and empirical developments of co-creation in branding. Following MacInnis' (2011) typology of conceptual contributions in marketing, this article contributes to the literature by *identifying* how co-creation has been understood and used in branding, responding to the call for clarity concerning the conceptualization of co-creation in branding (Biraghi & Gambetti, 2017; Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016). Then, a classification of the proposed types of co-creation summarizes the reviewed literature. A significant contribution of this article lies in its proposed definition of co-creation in branding, since it “resolve[s] definitional ambiguities and outline[s] the scope” (Palmatier et al., 2018, p. 2) of co-creation in branding, paving a way to assess outcomes of co-creation processes. Next, the findings of the literature review are discussed in further detail from both theoretical and managerial angles, followed by the proposed definition of co-creation in branding.

### 5.1. Theoretical implications

The literature review first addressed Theme 1 (*what is co-creation*), since co-creation as a phenomenon remains vaguely defined, while not distinguishing it from other branding phenomena.

As the results show, there is noteworthy agreement that co-creation is a process. Based on this review, two dimensions of the process of co-creation emerge from the literature: *interaction* and *influencing*.

*Interaction* in co-creation is reported in online and offline workshops, active discussions about a brand with or among different stakeholders, and even brand-related competitions, although the interaction may not always be symmetric. For example, a firm may encourage stakeholder interaction (e.g., by facilitating platforms or events for stakeholders) but take a lesser role in interaction and dialogue. As Vallaster and von Wallpach (2013) point out, online platforms have enabled co-creation with stakeholder participation on a larger scale and opened new opportunities for engaged stakeholders to discuss with firms and take on an active role in branding. However, in offline contexts, the impact of co-creation might be limited to a smaller number of participants, but as Chepurna and Rialp Criado (2018) suggest, face-to-face interaction may strengthen the social bond between the firm and the stakeholders in the absence of barriers, such as technology anxiety. Thus, new and innovative ways of interaction between the involved parties, which influence the brand, may emerge along with developments in traditional and social media. Future studies could also focus on the use of rhetoric when moving from contestation to convergence and partial agreement (Sorsa & Vaara, 2020) as a way of both interacting and influencing.

*Mere influencing*, without interaction between the parties involved, is also suggested as co-creation, based on the review. However, branding is traditionally about influencing (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2008) and has been studied widely. In other words, simply influencing does not represent new avenues for co-creation in branding, since influencing has always been the fundamental idea in branding (Aaker, 1996). In conclusion, this article suggests that new insights can be gained from co-creation approaches where both *interaction* between or among two or more parties around the brand, as well as *influence on the brand*, occur.

Furthermore, the analysis reveals that assessment through *measurement* is not often discussed in the reviewed articles, indicating a research gap. While measurement is an important step toward defining a concept (MacKenzie, 2003), processes may be studied using a variety of methods, such as analyzing longitudinal data (Pettigrew, 1990; Sminia, 2009). Challenges also arise since processes are ongoing accomplishments (Sandberg et al., 2015), indicating questions posed in the language of ‘becoming’ rather than ‘being’ (Pettigrew, 1992). Thus, process research includes dynamics and time—how the process starts, continues, and ends—and how it changes. In the reviewed articles, measurement proposals on co-creation are limited to specific occurrences in time from either the marketer’s or the stakeholder’s perception of the co-creation process per se, including interaction and influencing. Since

influencing indicates an outcome to be assessed or evaluated, future research could also focus on assessing various outcomes of co-creation. Further studies could also concentrate on assessing co-creation based on processual approaches (Pettigrew, 1990; Sandberg et al., 2015; Sminia, 2009) involving all participating parties—“all there is” (Sandberg et al., 2015, p. 318).

So far, research on co-creation in branding has identified a multitude of parties taking part in co-creation processes (Theme 2: *who initiates and who participates in co-creation*), labeled as a “full stakeholder perspective” by Hatch and Schultz (2010, p. 601). The review identifies varying perspectives on marketer and stakeholder initiation, participation, and facilitation. The nuances between marketer and stakeholder roles in co-creation indicate asymmetric power, since while participating in a co-creation process, the parties may not have equal power to influence the brand (Fisher & Smith, 2011). For instance, stakeholders may have little influence on branding strategy when the marketer initiates co-creation, while the marketer may have little control over stakeholders’ brand meanings and images (Mingione, Kashif, & Petrescu, 2020) when stakeholders initiate co-creation or when the marketer takes a step back to facilitate stakeholder engagement. This relates to relationship commitment (Brown et al., 1995; Kaufmann et al., 2016), not only commitment between the parties involved in co-creation, but also the marketer’s commitment to the brand in question or the strength of the brand relationship among stakeholders. Therefore, a critical aspect of co-creation is whom to invite in co-creation processes (Swaminathan et al., 2020)—only brand lovers or a combination of those who show various levels of commitment to the brand—since the selection of participants influences the brand, for example, depending on their resources and motivation (Merz et al., 2018).

As shown in the flourishing conceptual landscape of co-creation, revealed through Theme 3 (*what is co-created and for whom?*), the usage of co-creation in the branding literature denotes conceptual pluralism (see Fig. 4) and occasional inconsistency in the usage of branding concepts. This is not new in branding despite conceptual clarifications (see, e.g., Balmer, 2001; Stern, 2006), indicating the value of defining branding concepts when used—especially in co-creation research on branding due to the developing field. In sum, the fragmentation of identified outcomes of co-creation demonstrates the need to clarify both ontological positionings and definitions of the used concepts. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that co-creation processes may have unharmonious or even negative outcomes (Aspara et al., 2014; Rossolatos, 2019; Spry et al., 2018; Thomas, 2018). This represents an interesting and challenging co-destruction field (Lund et al., 2020) that resembles discussions on brand avoidance (Rindell et al., 2014) and brand hate (Rodrigues et al., 2020), among others.

Finally, as pointed out in the beginning of this article, ‘co’ connotes ‘together’. Interesting proposals are found, where outcomes, such as co-created brand meaning or brand value of a co-creation process, are positioned in the joint sphere ‘between’ the marketer and the stakeholder. A mutually co-created outcome could be viewed metaphorically as “a projection from two directions” (Alvesson, 2004, pp. 163–164), indicating that co-creation should also be assessed from both perspectives. Notably, assessing mutual outcomes may be challenging in processes where the involved parties’ perceptions may only be temporarily shared before taking diverging directions (Berthon et al., 2009). However, how can it be known that mutual influence exists if the outcomes are not assessed? These challenges in assessing mutual outcomes open up new avenues for research. Overall, while co-creation as a *process* may be a shared effort, its *outcomes* are neither necessarily shared nor those expected by the parties involved.

The discussion enables moving toward a definition of co-creation in branding, which considers the understandings emerging from the systematic search and critical review process. Based on the study, this article proposes that co-creation in branding includes both interaction among the parties involved and influencing the brand, for example, the branding strategy or brand images. Therefore, a definition of co-creation

in branding is proposed as follows: *Co-creation in branding refers to a process of intentional interaction between or among two or more parties that influences a brand.* Here, ‘a brand’ refers to either the marketer’s or the stakeholder’s perspective or both. Interaction may occur between or among the marketer and stakeholders (B2C/C2B/B2B), internally within organizations (Employee-to-Employee) or among various stakeholders (C2C). This definition is a suggested step toward conceptual clarity in the field of branding, enabling the development of research on co-creation in branding. In connection with the three themes, three positioning questions are proposed for such research:

1. *Specification of the parties acting as co-creators in the process of interaction and influencing.* Who initiates and who participates in co-creation?
2. *Specification of the outcomes.* What is co-created for the participating parties individually and/or for participating parties mutually?
3. *Specification of assessment.* How are the process of co-creation and its outcomes assessed?

These criteria are proposed to clarify and guide positioning in future studies on co-creation in branding and advance the development of specific research streams in the field.

### 5.2. Managerial implications

Although stakeholder understanding and insights have been on marketers’ agenda from the early years of branding (Merz et al., 2009), scholars agree that marketers still have an insufficient understanding of stakeholders (Schauman et al., 2021). In this respect, co-creation in branding represents an appealing opportunity for marketers to find out how stakeholders think and feel about a brand in order to support the marketers’ decision making for further brand development. Through interaction, co-creation also offers opportunities to influence stakeholders in a favorable way. For instance, involving consumers, customers, and other stakeholders in the co-creation of branding processes may be a valued experience for both the marketer and the participating stakeholders (Fisher & Smith, 2011; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2018), while having a positive impact on how stakeholders perceive the brand (Sorensen & Drennan, 2017). Thus, in ideal situations, co-creation represents a win–win situation for all involved parties. Undoubtedly, this might be the most interesting and appealing reason for marketers to engage in co-creation processes with stakeholders.

Nevertheless, several challenges for marketers emerge. First, in what kind of branding situation is co-creation an option? For all participating parties, co-creation requires resources and motivation (Merz et al., 2018). The findings show that so far, co-creation in branding has been used mainly for gaining customer and market insights (Biraghi & Gambetti, 2017; Ind et al., 2017; Kennedy & Guzmán, 2016) and for product and service brand development (Kennedy & Guzmán, 2016), as well as a collaboration method for developing branding strategy (Ind et al., 2017). This implies that marketers could view co-creation from at least two angles: brand development and product or service development. To obtain brand information, marketers may use resources, not only to create and organize co-creation activities (Ind et al., 2017), but also to analyze the outcomes of such activities (Smaliukiene et al., 2015) and potentially include these outcomes in new branding strategies and operations (Ripoll González & Gale, 2020). Additionally, since brand commitment (Glanfield et al., 2018), passion, and trust (Merz et al., 2018) influence the motivations to co-create, a critical success factor is the selection of participants. Questions arise regarding whom to invite to interact in co-creation processes (Swaminathan et al., 2020)—such as

only brand lovers or a mix of stakeholders with varying brand attachment and motivation profiles—since co-creating parties also influence one another and thus the outcomes of co-creation.

Co-creation in branding may also reveal vastly different stakeholder views in comparison to the marketer’s branding strategy (Aspara et al., 2014). Therefore, new challenges may emerge, specifically how to respond to these stakeholders’ views when planning and implementing the next step in branding. Therefore, it might become challenging to evaluate the value and usability of stakeholder views vis-à-vis the marketer’s resources and market understanding. In conclusion, despite the advantages of co-creation in branding, managers should not be overly optimistic about the ground-breaking benefits of co-creation but consider it a tool for strengthening marketer–stakeholder relationships and gaining new insights into how stakeholders de facto think and feel.

### 5.3. Limitations and suggestions for future research

This article contributes to extant literature by reviewing a multitude of proposals on co-creation in branding. Despite an extensive search and critical review, some limitations should be recognized. First, in terms of the systematic search and article selection process, limitations include the choice of databases, keywords in the search stage (‘brand’ and ‘co-creation’), and criteria for journal and article selection. The review only includes scientific journal publications in English, and the selected articles are limited to the database contents of Scopus and the Web of Science from January 2005 to May 2020. Additionally, the snowball sampling in stage 3 of the article selection process may be considered a limitation; however, it has been used to find additional articles that shed light on the early development of the co-creation concept.

Second, the critical review approach relies on researcher subjectivity (Snyder, 2019), which can be considered a limitation. The analysis focuses on conceptualizing and defining the parameters of what can be considered co-creation in branding. Therefore, this article is limited in the sense of excluding why co-creation occurs, that is, outlining various antecedents of co-creation in branding, such as marketers’ or stakeholders’ motivations to initiate or participate in co-creation. In terms of assessing the co-creation process, only ‘measurement’ proposals have been reviewed, which might have excluded qualitative studies using another vocabulary for assessing interaction and influencing.

Future reviews could include research in different languages and publications, such as books and conference papers, and also focus on antecedents of co-creation in branding. Furthermore, new interesting avenues for future studies could be explored through a processual approach (Pettigrew, 1990; Sandberg et al., 2015; Sminia, 2009), with a close examination of the co-creation process itself, including both temporal and dynamic dimensions. Future studies could also develop measurement proposals that reflect interaction and influencing from the perspectives of all involved parties. Finally, future research could discuss further—in both theory and practice—the challenge of mutual outcomes (Alvesson, 2004; Berthon et al., 2009) of co-creation in branding.

In conclusion, co-creation in branding is a broad concept referring to interaction and influence among various parties with a focus on a brand. For clarity and future development, the research field would benefit from the consistent use of the concept of co-creation in branding.

### Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A. Article selection

Stage	Action taken	Purpose of action	Articles after each stage
Search	Searches in Scopus and Web of Science Core Collection	Identifying relevant publications	721 (100.0%)
Exclusion	Articles from journals not listed in the AJG 2018 excluded	Excluding articles of insufficient quality	580 (80.4%)
	Articles published outside marketing or management excluded	Excluding articles outside field of study	477 (66.3%)
	Articles not including both the terms “co-creation” and “brand” in the abstract excluded	Excluding articles beyond scope of study	
	Articles not addressing co-creation in branding excluded	Excluding articles beyond study’s aim	189 (26.2%)
			144 (20.0%)
Snowball sampling	Articles published before 2008 added through snowball sampling	Shedding light on early conceptual development	148 (20.5%)

Appendix B. Full overview of literature reviewx

Year	Authors	Theme 1a. What is co-creation?			Theme 1b. How is co-creation measured?		Theme 2. Who initiates and who participates in co-creation?			Theme 3. What is co-created and for whom?		
		Interaction (B2C, B2B, C2B)	Interaction (C2C)	Influencing without interaction (B2C, B2B, C2B, C2C)	Measured from marketer perspective	Measured from stakeholder perspective	Marketer initiates co-creation	Stakeholder initiates co-creation	Marketer facilitates co-creation	Marketer sphere as locus, e.g., branding strategy	Stakeholder sphere as locus, e.g., brand image	Joint sphere as locus, e.g., brand value
2005	Jones	•		•					•		•	
2006	Brodie et al.	•							•		•	
2007	Ballantyne & Aitken			•			•		•		•	
	Boyle			•					•		•	
2009	Berthon et al.	•	•						•		•	
	Merz et al.			•			•		•		•	
	Payne et al.	•		•			•		•		•	
2010	Hatch & Schultz	•							•		•	
	Tynan et al.	•							•		•	
2011	Aitken & Campelo			•					•		•	
	Christodoulides et al.			•			•		•		•	
	Fisher & Smith	•	•				•		•		•	
	Hakala & Lemmetyinen	•	•						•		•	
	Pongsakornrungrasit & Schroeder		•				•				•	
	Saraniemi		•	•			•				•	
2012	Anker et al.			•					•		•	
	Christodoulides et al.	•	•			•	•		•		•	
	Hatch			•			•		•		•	
	Juntunen	•				•			•		•	
	Singh & Sonnenburg			•					•		•	
2013	Yazicioğlu & Borak	•	•				•		•		•	
2013	Brodie et al.		•				•				•	
	Gyrd-Jones & Kornum	•						•			•	
	Healy & McDonagh		•				•				•	
	Iglesias et al.	•						•			•	
	Ind et al.	•					•		•		•	
	Jeanes			•					•		•	
	Lloyd & Woodside			•			•		•		•	
	Vallaster & von Wallpach		•	•			•				•	
	2014	Aspara et al.	•	•			•					•
	Nysveen & Pedersen	•				•			•		•	
2015	Conejo & Wooliscroft			•					•		•	
Cova et al.	•					•		•		•		
France et al.	•	•				•		•		•		
Gambetti & Graffigna	•	•				•		•		•		
Hanna & Rowley	•		•			•	•	•		•		

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Year	Authors	Theme 1a. What is co-creation?			Theme 1b. How is co-creation measured?		Theme 2. Who initiates and who participates in co-creation?			Theme 3. What is co-created and for whom?		
		Interaction (B2C, B2B, C2B)	Interaction (C2C)	Influencing without interaction (B2C, B2B, C2B, C2C)	Measured from marketer perspective	Measured from stakeholder perspective	Marketer initiates co-creation	Stakeholder initiates co-creation	Marketer facilitates co-creation	Marketer sphere as locus, e.g., branding strategy	Stakeholder sphere as locus, e.g., brand image	Joint sphere as locus, e.g., brand value
	Kandampully et al.	•	•	•			•		•			•
	Lindstedt	•					•			•		
	Oliveira & Panyik	•		•				•	•	•		
	Seljeseth & Korneliusson	•							•		•	
	Shao et al.	•	•	•					•			•
	Skålén et al.	•					•		•			•
	Zhang et al. (a)	•		•	•		•					•
	Zhang et al. (b)	•	•	•			•		•			•
2016	Aal et al.	•	•	•					•			•
	Alden et al.	•	•				•		•	•		
	Brodie & Benson-Rea	•		•					•			•
	Choi et al.	•					•					•
	Cova & Paraque	•	•					•				•
	Dean et al.	•		•					•			•
	Gambetti et al.	•						•			•	
	Green et al.	•							•			•
	Kaufmann et al.	•	•					•				•
	Kennedy & Guzmán	•	•						•			•
	Merrilees	•					•	•			•	•
	Millsbaugh & Kent	•		•			•		•	•		•
	Popp & Woratschek	•	•					•				•
	Ramaswamy & Ozcan	•					•	•				•
	Roncha & Radclyffe-Thomas	•	•					•				•
	Scandeliuss & Cohen	•					•			•		
	Solem	•					•					•
	Starr & Brodie			•					•	•		
	Stiehler			•				•				•
	Üçok Hughes et al.			•					•			•
2017	Biraghi & Gambetti	•							•		•	•
	Black & Veloutsou		•	•				•			•	•
	Brodie		•	•				•			•	•
	Brodie et al.	•							•			•
	Centeno & Wang		•	•				•				•
	Chiang et al.		•					•				•
	Davari et al.	•	•					•				•
	Hajli et al.		•	•				•				•
	Hollebeek et al.		•					•			•	
	Ind et al.	•					•			•		
	Kennedy	•					•					•
	Kennedy & Guzmán	•					•					•
	Lee & Soon			•				•				•
	Lee et al.	•	•			•			•			•
	Nobre & Ferreira			•				•			•	
	Pathak & Pathak-Shelat			•					•			•
	Rosenthal & Brito	•	•				•	•				•
	Sorensen & Drennan	•	•					•			•	•
	Von Wallpach et al.	•	•	•				•				•
	Voyer et al.			•					•			•
2018	Bento et al.		•					•				•
	Chang et al.	•		•	•		•					•
	France et al.	•	•			•		•				•
	Glanfield et al.	•					•					•
	Green et al.	•	•	•				•				•
	He et al.	•			•		•					•
	Kim et al.	•							•	•		•
	Koivisto & Mattila		•	•					•		•	
	Kristal et al.	•		•				•				•
	Lin et al.	•					•	•				•
	Merz et al.		•	•				•				•
	Samuel et al.		•	•				•				•
	Shen et al.		•					•				•
	Sigala		•						•			•
	Spry et al.	•					•	•		•		•
	Tajvidi et al.		•		•		•	•				•
		•	•				•	•				•

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Year	Authors	Theme 1a. What is co-creation?			Theme 1b. How is co-creation measured?		Theme 2. Who initiates and who participates in co-creation?			Theme 3. What is co-created and for whom?		
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2019	Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach											
	Thomas	•		•								•
	Törmälä & Saraniemi	•	•	•			•		•		•	
	Vallaster & von Wallpach	•					•	•		•		•
	Ahn et al.	•				•		•			•	
	Busser & Shulga	•	•	•			•		•			•
	Carlson et al.	•	•					•				•
	Cassia & Magno	•		•				•				•
	Essamri et al.	•	•					•		•		
	Fujita et al.	•		•				•		•		•
	González-Mansilla et al.	•		•		•			•			•
	Kucharska		•					•	•			•
	Källström & Hultman	•	•	•					•	•		•
	Lucarelli		•	•					•			•
	Luo et al.		•						•		•	
	McLeay et al.	•	•	•					•		•	
	Merrilees & Miller		•			•			•		•	
	Paraskevaidis & Weidenfeld			•				•	•		•	
	Rajagopal			•					•			•
	Rather et al.	•		•				•	•			•
Rossolatos	•		•		•			•			•	
Roy et al.	•	•	•				•				•	
Sanz-Blas et al.			•		•					•		
Sarkar & Banerjee	•	•	•				•	•			•	
Schmeltz & Kjeldsen	•	•	•				•	•	•		•	
Stach			•					•			•	
Veloutsou & Black	•	•	•				•	•			•	
Vollero et al.	•							•			•	
Wang et al.			•		•			•			•	
Williams et al.	•		•					•	•	•		
2020	Bertschy et al.	•	•	•				•			•	•
	Cheung et al.	•	•	•		•		•		•	•	•
	Grenni et al.	•	•	•				•			•	•
	Grohs et al.	•	•	•				•			•	•
	Iglesias et al.	•		•				•		•		•
	Ind et al.	•		•				•		•		•
	Masiello et al.	•		•				•		•		•
	Mingione et al. (a)	•		•				•		•		•
	Mingione et al. (b)	•	•	•				•	•	•	•	•
	Mingione & Leoni	•		•				•				•
	Omar et al.	•		•		•		•			•	•
	Ripoll González & Gale	•	•	•				•	•			•
	Saha et al.	•							•			•
	Seifert & Kwon	•	•	•		•		•				•
	Suomi et al.	•	•					•	•			•
Swaminathan et al.	•	•	•				•	•		•	•	
Taks et al.	•	•					•		•		•	
Yu et al.	•	•	•				•	•		•	•	

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**Sonja Sarasvuo** (MSc) is a Doctoral student at HANKEN School of Economics, Centre for Relationship Marketing and Service Management. Her research interests include corporate branding, business-to-business branding, and organizational identity studies.

**Anne Rindell** (PhD) is Associate Professor at the Department of Marketing at HANKEN School of Economics, Centre for Relationship Marketing and Service Management, CERS. She holds a PhD at Hanken School of Economics. Her research interests are branding, brand and image heritage, tourism management and place branding, and arts marketing. She has published in *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, *Journal of Branding*, *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, among others.

**Marina Kovalchuk** (MSc) is a Doctoral student and lecturer at the University of Eastern Finland (Business School, International Business and Sales Management), and her research focuses on the fields of business-to-business branding, brand anthropomorphism and international B2B relationships.