Sparking conversations on Facebook brand pages: Investigating fans' reactions to rhetorical brand posts

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

On Facebook brands create pages to facilitate interaction with their (potential) customers, or fans. Brands publish content on these pages which often contain rhetorical figures. Facebook's technological affordances allow fans to respond to these posts leading to multiple participation framework levels that were initiated and can be seen by the brand, but may — at some point — no longer involve the brand. In this study, we uncovered how brands initiate interaction by posting content in an artfully divergent way by collecting 62 Dutch Facebook posts from 12 brands and fans' reactions they evoked. Using a mixed-methods approach, the posts' rhetorical figures and how fans responded to them were analyzed. The results showed that brands' posts often contain a deviation in meaning which enabled fans to respond in various ways: they responded to the actions posts generated, such as answering questions, but also responded by evaluating the brands. Despite the post's rhetorical type (trope or scheme), format (visual, verbal, or verbo-pictorial), or relevant next action projected, rhetorical posts on brand pages secure responses and thus participation from fans.

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1. Introduction

Traditionally, interaction between brands and customers occurred predominantly offline (Nicholls, 2010). Nowadays, this interaction has shifted to social media platforms, which allow interaction to take place at any place and time (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013). Worldwide more than 3.2 billion people actively use social media (Smart Insights, 2018) and therefore brands try to stimulate interaction with their customers by distributing content and by addressing customers' questions, complaints, and feedback (Hanna et al., 2011; Dijkmans et al., 2015).

However, social media have not only provided new opportunities for brand—customer interaction, they have also resulted in new challenges for brands. Compared to traditional media (e.g., television, radio, and magazines), in which customers are merely passive receivers[1] of the brand messages, the interactive and participatory character of social media enables customers to actively distribute and co-create brand content as well as publicly evaluate the brand in a positive or negative way

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[1] This is also changing as for example TV is becoming interactive through the use of second screens.

(Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Jahn and Kunz, 2012). The technological affordances of social media platforms and the levels on which brands and customers communicate, ask for a reconsideration of the participation framework (also see Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014).

One specific way brands use social media platforms to foster their relationship with customers is by creating an online brand community on Facebook on which they post content (videos, pictures, quizzes, etc.) for marketing purposes (De Vries et al., 2012). Customers can become fans of these brand communities. Fans tend to be loyal and committed to the brand, and are more open to receiving information about the brand (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; De Vries et al., 2012). On Facebook brand pages fans can share their enthusiasm about the brand (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; De Vries et al., 2012). The content brands post on their Facebook pages elicits interaction: fans can interact with both the brand and each other by liking, sharing, and commenting (Dekay, 2012; De Vries et al., 2012). In this paper, it is argued that by doing so brands create participation. Through labelling fans as such, brands write their audience into being (Boyd, 2006, and also see Marwick and boyd, 2011 for a further discussion). Arguably, brands communicate with a rather specific audience on Facebook, specifically those who have become fans, but at the same time fans are also connected to each other. Marwick and boyd's have used the term 'networked audience' to describe this specific type of recipients (2011: 129).

Whereas brands seek participation through Facebook, a significant role of Facebook itself is to facilitate interpersonal relationships. According to Ellison et al. (2007) it is primarily used as a means of maintaining relationships with others, particularly among geographically separated networked individuals. As brands are moving their marketing activities to Facebook, they are increasingly confronted with the fact that they are not welcome on this platform as their presence is intrusive and out of place (Fournier and Avery, 2011). It is therefore important that brands do not merely post advertisements on Facebook brand pages, but provide content that fans actually want to read, like, share, and comment on; content that sparks conversation. When fans interact with a brand post (i.e., liking, sharing, and/or commenting), they generally pass it along to their network of contacts on Facebook; i.e., a brand post is shared with a larger audience (Araujo, 2015). Their contacts do not only see the brand post, but also information about which person in their network interacted with the post and how often the post has been liked, shared, and/or commented on. This information could potentially make the brand post more persuasive compared to an advertisement (Araujo, 2015).

In many forms of advertising across all sorts of media (e.g., magazines, tv, billboards), brands use indirect persuasion techniques (Van Enschot and Hoeken, 2015; McQuarrie and Phillips, 2005). When using indirect persuasion techniques, consumers are invited to construct the multilayered meaning of the message which goes beyond what is explicitly stated in the advertisement (McQuarrie and Phillips, 2005). Rhetorical figures represent a type of indirect claim as they make claims in a figurative way, i.e., the advertising message is only implied (McQuarrie and Phillips, 2005). McQuarrie and Mick (1996: 425) define rhetorical figures as artful expressions that deviate from consumers' expectations. These indirect persuasion techniques also occur on Facebook brand pages as is exemplified in Fig. 1 showing a Facebook post of Lipton. The picture contains a rhetorical figure: a cup of tea on top of a high building. The caption states "Are you also ready for a high tea?" (Dutch: "Ben jij ook zo toe aan een high tea?"). Together the picture (i.e., high tea as in a cup of tea at a high altitude) and the caption (i.e., high tea as in a meal that includes tea to be served on special occasions) generate a rhetorical figure. In short, this post artfully deviates from communicating Lipton's claim straightforwardly (e.g., Lipton tea is particularly suited to be served with a high tea) by using multiple rhetorical figures.

Fig. 1. Brand post of Lipton with the caption: "Are you also in need of a high tea?".

Arguably, the presence of a rhetorical figure in a Facebook brand post might invite fans to search for the intended interpretation and thus participate on the Facebook brand page — either through interaction with the post (the brand) or other fans. In this paper, seek to understand how brand posts spark a conversation on the different participation levels that are created through Facebook. Specifically, how fans respond to brand posts that contain an indirect claim by using rhetorical figures (i.e., verbal and visual schemes and tropes) is investigated. An interactional approach was adopted to qualitatively analyze the interaction that is evoked by the rhetorical figures in the brand post. In other words, we try to understand how social actions are produced and understood by fans themselves. In face-to-face conversations, participants produce and orient to such actions through sequences (Sacks, 1987): a greeting receives a greeting, an invitation an acceptance or rejection. In this particular Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) context the sequence 'post-reaction' is present, i.e., fans respond directly to the post. This interactional perspective has only recently received attention in the context of social media (for an overview on using interactional methods for online data in general see Giles et al., 2015 and on Facebook in particular see Farina, 2018). This is somewhat surprising because an understanding of mediated communication as the intersection of interpersonal communication and mass communication involves complex meaning making processes that are clearly relevant in the context of corporate social media interaction.

In the following section, the position of Facebook brand page communication within a participation framework is explained. Next, the notion of rhetorical figures and how they can spark conversations is explicated. Subsequently, the data collection and the mixed-methods approach is explained. After presenting the analysis in section 4, the implications of the mixed-methods strategy are discussed in section 5. Findings and their implications for corporate Facebook communication are presented in section 6.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Facebook brand page communication within a new participation framework

Over the last few years several scholars have worked on setting out a new participation framework for CMC, particularly focusing on YouTube (Boyd, 2014; Dynel, 2014), in order to better understand the complex communication processes within CMC. These frameworks lay out how multi-party interaction works on various levels within a particular social media platform. For example, according to Dynel (2014) and also Boyd (2014) YouTube operates on at least two levels (where level 1a and 1b can also be seen as two separate levels according to Dynel): 1a) speakers and hearers in the video interaction itself; 1b) sender and recipients of the YouTube video and 2) Youtube speakers and hearers (registered and unregistered users) who comment underneath the video.

Although there is no explicit participation framework for Facebook brand pages, the insights from Boyd (2014) and Dynel (2014) are used to come to an understanding of how Facebook brand page communication works. Facebook communication can be characterized by speakers' and hearers' spatial separation and possible temporal separation and infinite numbers of potential participants at the reception end, who are (un)familiar with each other. In this paper Facebook brand page communication is regarded as asynchronous, online, multi-party interaction, although it is possible that fans are online when a brand publishes a post on Facebook, i.e., quasi—synchronous interaction (Garcia and Jacobs, 1998).

Since Facebook allows for videos, images, or text posts (and a combination of these modes), the first level within the participation framework concerns the static (image and/or text) or dynamic (video) visual displayed in the original post by the brand. The second level concerns the (representative of the) brand (i.e., the sender) and the recipients (i.e., anybody who visits the company brand page). The third level concerns the people who comment on the original post. Comments can be read without having to log in but can only be made when one is logged into Facebook. Comments can then be directed at the brand, at the representative (designer/communication staff member/customer service staff member), at a specific fan who commented earlier, or at all participants in general, collapsing multiple audiences into one (Marwick & boyd, 2011). In the latter two cases, the original sender (i.e., (representative of) the brand) may become "invisible", similar to the YouTube sender in Dynel's analysis of Gordon Ramsey posters and commenters (2014: 44).

Besides this multi-level participation framework, Facebook offers specific affordances that are often discussed in CMC research. The term 'affordance', originally introduced by Gibson (1979), is often used in relation to technology (see for example Norman, 2013). It refers to the opportunities that a social media platform provides for interaction. Facebook offers a variety of features that allow fans to share and discuss brand posts. Specifically, fans can participate by clicking on the *Like* button which allows them to perform several pragmatic functions, such as acknowledging, expressing interest, and showing support (Farina, 2018). Fans can also participate by clicking the *Comment* button. These comments can be made up of verbal and nonverbal elements. However, fans do not have control over the positioning of comments posted in a thread (Farina, 2018). Moreover, fans can tag friends in their comments meaning that their friends receive a notification about the comment (Farina, 2018). Finally, in February 2016, Facebook introduced a new way for fans to participate: *Reaction* buttons consisting only of emojis that allow fans to post an emotional response to brand posts (Farina, 2018). Interestingly, Facebook can measure the different ways in which fans participate, by counting how many *Likes* and *Reactions* a post receives. However, what participants are actually "doing" in their posts and comments in reaction to what types of posts remains unexplored and will be the focus of this paper. Facebook's multi-level participation framework with its range of

technological affordances provides the context within companies' rhetorical messages on Facebook brand pages were analyzed.

2.2. Rhetorical figures in advertising messages

Professional communicators often use rhetorical figures in advertisements to create messages that attract attention and that are more persuasive than other (straightforward) messages (McQuarrie and Mick, 1999; Mothersbaugh et al., 2002). Such rhetorical figures are also used by brands on Facebook brand pages. Rhetorical figures can be classified into two categories: schemes and tropes (McQuarrie and Mick, 1996). Schemes deviate from audience's expectations through an excessive regularity of form (e.g., rhyme, alliteration) (McQuarrie and Mick, 1996). For example, the alliteration in Jaguar's slogan "Don't dream it. Drive it" does not alter the meaning of message nor does it require the audience to make inferences about the intended interpretation. Tropes on the other hand violate audience's expectations through a deviation in meaning, i.e., there is more to them than meets the eye (e.g., puns, novel metaphors) (McQuarrie and Mick, 1996). For example, the metaphor in Coca-Cola's slogan "Open Happiness" invites the audience to conceive one thing (a can of Coca-Cola) in terms of another (happiness). Tropes, thus, invite the audience to invest cognitive effort to arrive at the intended meaning based on existing knowledge or other elements in the ad (McQuarrie and Mick, 1996). Although the categorization in tropes and schemes originated from spoken and written language, it also applies to visual communication (Forceville, 1996; Lagerwerf et al., 2012; Phillips and McQuarrie, 2004; Van Mulken et al., 2010). Rhetorical figures can also occur through the combination of text and pictures (Forceville, 1996; Van Enschot et al., 2008). These verbo-pictorial rhetorical figures can be interwoven and therefore require little cognitive effort to be understood, or, they can be a meaningful mismatch or incongruity between the text and the picture, which does require a deeper level of cognitive processing.

Research on rhetorical figures in advertising has mainly focused on the comprehensibility and appreciation of tropes. Being able to arrive at the intended meaning of a trope provides the audience with a pleasurable experience that in turn leads towards a positive attitude towards the ad. However, when the audience does not come up with a relevant interpretation, they get frustrated which leads to negative evaluation of the ad (McQuarrie and Mick, 1999; Phillips, 2000; Van Enschot et al., 2008; Van Mulken et al., 2010).

The cognitive and affective effects of tropes in ads can also generate conversations. Hoeken et al. (2009) proposed a framework to explain the willingness of people to discuss tropes in health campaigns. They argue that the audience is willing to discuss the riddle posed by the trope in a message when they are sure that they understand it. If this is the case, they may have two reasons to engage in a conversation. First, they may want to demonstrate their ability of solving the riddle under the assumption that others have failed to do so. Second, they may want to share their evaluation of a message's artfulness or cleverness as a way to strengthen their group identity. Lubinga et al. (2014) tested whether the presence of verbal and visual rhetorical figures in health messages targeted at South African youth predicted the respondents' willingness to engage in discussions about the messages with friends or older people. The results showed that verbal rhetorical figures negatively affected respondents' willingness to discuss the health messages, and no effect was found for visual rhetorical figures. The authors conclude that no support was found for the reasons to engage in a conversation as suggested in Hoeken et al. (2009). However, in the experiment only respondents' intention for discussions were measured and actual conversations were not observed. Therefore, a follow-up experiment was conducted in which young South African women participated in a short conversation (i.e., 2 min) about a deliberately puzzling HIV and AIDS poster Lubinga et al. (2016). Their comprehension of the poster and their beliefs about the health message were measured before and after the conversation. The results showed that the comprehension of the poster was low. Moreover, the conversation led to a lower understanding of the health message Lubinga et al. (2016).

In the present study, authentic online Facebook data is used to uncover how fans respond to rhetorical figures by investigating the use of verbal and visual schemes and tropes in posts on Facebook brand pages and the interaction they evoke. Arguably, the presence of a rhetorical figure in a Facebook brand post invite fans' participation: a post might invite fans to comment on the intended interpretation, and/or discuss the extent to which the brand post is artful or clever. To uncover what types of response rhetorical figures evoke, it is necessary to investigate which rhetorical figures occur. Therefore, the first research question is: how do verbal and visual schemes and tropes occur in companies' posts on Facebook brand pages? In order to understand how rhetorical posts evoke interaction it is necessary to systematically analyze the actions fans use to respond to the rhetorical post. Thus, the second research question is: how do fans respond to the rhetorical posts on Facebook brand pages? A systematic analysis of the types of actions fans produce will lead to an understanding of how fans engage with the rhetorical post. In order to answer these research questions a rhetorical analysis will be combined with an interactional analysis approach to study how rhetorical figures in Facebook brand posts stimulate interaction — and thus participation - amongst fans and what type of interaction emerges.

3. Method

3.1. Data

62 Dutch multimodal posts (i.e., containing a picture and text) were collected from 12 international brands that were actively posting content on their Facebook page. The fan base (i.e., number of followers, established in April 2015) of these

brands varied from 76.000 to 402.526.387 (M = 5.772.083, SD = 11.726.798). The sample of posts represented a broad range of brands and products, including beverages, food, aviation, and finance. The brand posts were selected based on the following criteria at the time of collection: 1) the brands were in the top 100 rankings of companies who excel in employing social media,[2] 2) the post contained one or more rhetorical figures, and 3) the post received more than 15 reactions. The data span a period of approximately 16 months between January 2014 and April 2015. Also, 15 to 20 textual reactions per post (M = 18.40, SD = 2.29) were collected at which point there was enough material to uncover phenomena for the interactional analysis. Table 1 shows a detailed description of the data.

Table 1
Description of the data.

Brand	Number of posts	Number of analyzed reactions
Bavaria	5	75
Grolsch	4	60
Heineken	6	95
Chocomel	5	95
Fernandes	5	100
Lipton	4	76
Pepsi	5	93
Oreo	7	140
KLM	7	140
ABN AMRO	3	55
ING	6	117
Rabobank	5	95
Total	62	1141

A permanent copy of the data was made by placing the posts and associated reactions in chronological order in a Microsoft Access database. This database facilitated the quantitative analysis of the rhetorical analysis of the posts and was used as an archiving tool for the interactional analysis of the reactions to the posts. Informed consent from the companies or the fans was not asked, as the data was and is publicly available to anyone with internet access. Pseudonyms, nicknames, and modified person-related information were used to ensure anonymity. The excerpts shown are our own translations.

3.2. Rhetorical analysis of the brand posts

The first research question was answered by a rhetorical analysis focusing on the presence of verbal, visual and verbo-pictorial rhetorical figures in brand posts in order to gain an initial understanding of how companies use rhetorical figures in posts to stimulate interaction on their brand pages. As the analysis of rhetorical figures has proven to be complicated and multi-interpretable (see for example Van Enschot and Hoeken, 2015), the rhetorical posts were analyzed by two independent raters using a detailed codebook and coding was done in four rounds. The codebook, which was partly based on Van Enschot and Hoeken (2015), contained a general description of rhetorical figures and detailed instructions on how to recognize verbal, visual and verbo-pictorial schemes and tropes. The coding procedure consisted of three steps. First, the raters determined whether a rhetorical figure was present in the pictorial part of the brand post. If so, they determined whether it was a trope and/or a scheme. Second, they assessed whether a rhetorical figure was present in the verbal part of the posts, i.e. the caption or headline in the picture. If so, they determined whether it was a trope and/or a scheme. Third, they determined whether a verbo-pictorial rhetorical figure was present in the combination of the picture, caption, and headline using the procedure described by Forceville (1996).[3]

The corpus was randomly divided into four sets: 1 set of 5 posts, 2 sets of 10 posts, and 1 set of 37 posts. In a first training session, two raters first analyzed the first set of 5 posts together, after which they independently coded the second and third set. After coding the first and second set, the raters discussed their coding, which led to refinements of the codebook. For the calculation of interrater reliability scores, the raters independently coded the remaining 37 posts. The results of interrater reliability tests showed that the agreement between the two coders ranged from "moderate" to "perfect" (visual rhetoric: $\alpha = 0.61$; visual trope: $\alpha = 0.84$; visual scheme: $\alpha = 0.65$; verbal rhetoric in headline = .75; verbal trope in headline: $\alpha = 0.83$; verbal rhetoric in caption = .73; verbal trope in caption: $\alpha = 0.73$; verbal scheme in caption: $\alpha = 1.00$, verbo-pictorial: $\alpha = 0.48$)[4] (Landis and Koch, 1977).

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[2] The rankings on socialmediamonitor.nl and socialbakers.com were used.

[3] An initial analysis of the data showed that there were no verbo-rhetorical schemes. Therefore, the coding step involving the decision whether the verbo-pictorial rhetorical figure was a trope or scheme was not included.

[4] Cohen's kappa could not be computed for verbal schemes in the headlines as they were not present in this subset of the data. The low kappa score for verbo-pictorial figures was considered as adequate because there was a high observed agreement between the raters (21 of the 37 posts, 75,7%).

3.3. Interactional analysis of reactions

The second research question was answered by an interactional analysis of the reactions in which fans' comments on the rhetorical Facebook posts were qualitatively analyzed. Since 'digital conversation analysis' (Giles et al., 2015), is methodologically still being developed and discussed, Stommel and Koole's (2010) interactional analysis of an online eating disorder community was the inspiration for the interactional analysis of the reactions. In addition, Giles et al.'s (2015) suggestions were followed, so that, 1) both the technological and social context of the Facebook communities were taken into consideration during the analysis; 2) collections were built based on phenomena found in the data through inductive analyses, and 3) original data excerpts were used. Giles et al. (2015) also suggested developing transcription guidelines for the digital data. However, the data in the original format proved to be the most informative for the analysis. Therefore, the contributions from the fans in their reactions were not altered.

Facebook generates a new participation framework for multiparty interaction. Since, the brand posts in the corpus only contained text and a picture, there is no interaction on the first level (as described by Dynel, 2014) within the post. The second participatory level consists of the brand sending the rhetorical post to anyone with access to Facebook (through posting it on their Facebook brand page). The third level consists of the recipients responding to a) the brand; b) all other (no specific) recipients in general; c) a particular recipient (for example someone who commented earlier to a brand post). These various types of addressees result in different types of sequences, i.e., fans responding directly to the company, fans responding to anyone in general, or fans responding to a particular other fan.

All posts and reactions within the corpus were analyzed in terms of actions; inherent to the method of conversation analysis which examines how social actions are produced and understood by the participants themselves (see for example Schegloff, 1996; Ten Have, 2007). According to Antaki et al. (2005) and Vayreda and Antaki (2009) sequentiality in online interaction in the context of online forums can be considered equal to sequentiality in face-to-face interaction. In this study, a similar position is taken and it is argued that within the Facebook environment actions in brand posts, such as questions, open up space for corresponding actions such as answers in fans' reactions. This is similar to Farina's conversation-analytic inspired work that demonstrates that Facebook status updates can be seen as first pair parts that invite conditionally relevant second pair parts, such as second tellings, evaluations, and requests for clarifications (Farina, 2015:9). The notion of conditional relevance is important here. Within conversation analysis, this notion is defined by Schegloff (1968:1083) as follows:

> "By conditional relevance of one item on another we mean: given the first, the second is expectable; upon its occurrence it can be seen to be a second item to the first; upon its nonoccurrence it can be seen to be officially absent — all this provided by the occurrence of the first item."

In Facebook brand pages a post can make a next action conditionally relevant. However, what is distinctly different to face-to-face communication is that if a fan responds otherwise he or she is not held accountable for the nonoccurrence of the conditionally relevant second item. Farina (2018: 135) also notices that Facebook threads do not uphold the adjacency pair sequence the way spoken conversation does. His main point is that first and second pair parts do not have to be adjacent (p. 135—136). This is partly because of the technological affordances of how Facebook comments work. For example, by clicking on the *Comment* button fans' contributions are placed underneath all previous comments (Farina, 2018: 138). Fans may think they are responding directly to the original post, but their 'turn' will occur underneath all other previous posts so that the first and second pair part are no longer adjacent. At the same time, fans can comment directly on each other's comments and thus create another layer within the conversation, creating a new adjacency pair sequence. Furthermore, even if a specific post makes a next action relevant (for example, answering a question), Facebook fans can diverge from this social "rule" (for example, by tagging someone else) in ways that would never occur in face-to-face interaction.

In order to come to a full understanding of what actions rhetorical Facebook brand posts evoke, the actions of the pictorial and verbal parts of the brand posts were qualitatively analyzed, such as presenting a riddle, posing questions, giving statements, or well wishing, as well as the actions the fans performed in response to rhetorical brand post. The analysis showed that besides simply responding to invited actions in the post (section 4.2), there were also non-invited responses (section 4.3). After several data sessions with the authors and several conversation analytic scholars three types of non-invited actions performed by the fans were found to be most frequent in the data. These actions in relation to the participation framework that is created on Facebook brand pages will be discussed in the next section.

4. Analyses

4.1. Use of rhetorical figures in Facebook brand posts

The first research question was about how schemes and tropes occurred in posts on Facebook brand pages. All posts had a picture of which almost three-quarters (46: 74.2%) contained a rhetorical figure. Visual tropes (24: 52.2%) occurred more often than visual schemes (14: 30.4%). Fig. 2 exemplifies a visual trope in a post of Oreo: the cookie and the oyster can be interpreted as being similar (so that both contain something pearly white). Fig. 3 shows a post of Fernandes in which a visual scheme is present (i.e., through a repetition of the brand logo on the bottles and cans). Almost one in five posts contained both a trope and a scheme (8: 17.4%).

Fig. 2. Brand post of Oreo containing a visual trope.

Fig. 3. Brand post of Fernandes with the caption: "There is nothing more important than family."

Verbal rhetorical figures could either occur in the headline (i.e., text in the post's picture) or in the caption (i.e., text placed above the post's picture). Almost four in ten posts (23: 37.1%) contained a headline. In 14 posts, the headline contained a verbal rhetorical figure; tropes (13: 92.9%) were more frequent than schemes (1: 7.14%). Almost all posts (61: 98.4%) contained a caption. In 29 posts, the caption contained a verbal rhetorical figure; tropes (22: 75.9%) were more frequent than schemes (12 41.3%). Five captions (17.2%) contained both a trope and a scheme and a trope (17.2%). An example of a verbal trope was found in the caption of a Pepsi post: "Ctrl Alt Refresh". This verbal deviation refers to the action people have to take when resetting their computer (i.e., pressing Ctrl Alt Delete) implying that when fans drink a Pepsi they instantly get refreshed.

Brand posts often contained multiple multimodal rhetorical figures through a combination of a visual and a verbal rhetorical figure (10: 16.1%), but also through a combination of a verbo-pictorial figure and a visual and/or verbal rhetorical figure (30: 48.4%). Fig. 4 exemplifies a combination of a visual trope (a DJ-deck on a Pepsi bottle) and a verbal scheme in the caption of a Pepsi post. The caption reads "What fresh track do you have on-deck?" (Dutch: "Welke frisse track heb jij nu on-deck?"), playing with the adjective 'fresh' that relates to a fresh track and a fresh bottle of Pepsi as well as 'on-deck' referring to the deck on top of the Pepsi bottle shown in the picture.
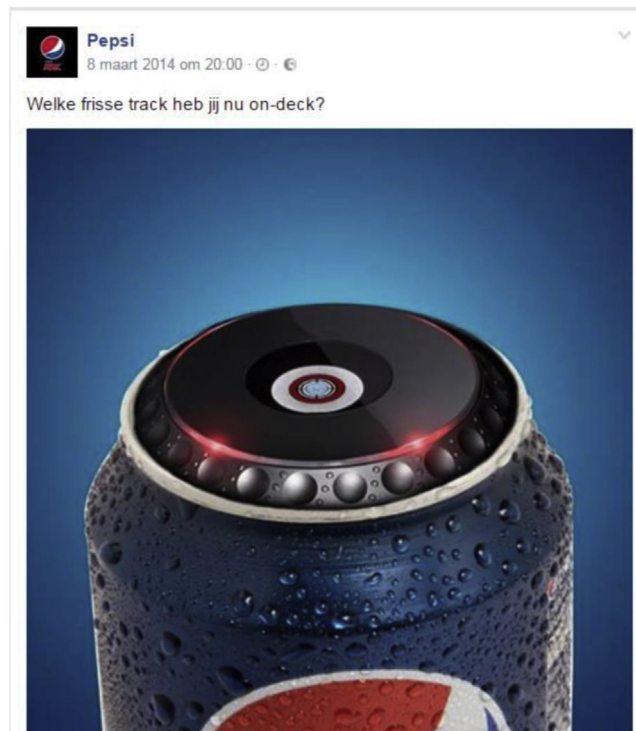
Fig. 4. Brand post of Pepsi with the caption: "Which fresh track do you have on-deck?".

Fig. 3 not only exemplifies a visual scheme (through a repetition of the brand logo on the bottles and cans) but also a verbo-pictorial figure. The picture shows bottles and cans of soft drinks and is accompanied by the caption: "There is nothing more important than family" (Dutch: "Er is niets belangrijker dan familie"). This incongruity can be resolved by interpreting the cans and bottles of soft drinks as one family.

In short, brand posts often contained multiple multimodal rhetorical figures, and, according to the literature, require quite some cognitive effort to be understood. The next section discusses what types of actions are evoked by the rhetorical brand posts.

4.2. Doing what is required: conditionally relevant responses to rhetorical Facebook posts

The second research question concerns the relation between the rhetorical figures in the post and the actions the post evokes. In most posts, the action in the headline or caption was leading in the types of responses that were given. For example, the caption in the Pepsi post "What fresh track do you have on-deck?" (Dutch: "Welke frisse track heb jij nu on-deck?") contains a verbal scheme (see Fig. 4). Together with the picture, it makes a clear next action conditionally relevant (i.e., giving an answer). In Excerpt 1 (line 1—4) similar answers are being given.

Excerpt 1: PEPSI FRESH TRACK (see Fig. 4)

1	Iddo:	Beyoncé- grown woman
2	Gerben:	Frontlines — i'm the melody man
3	Tiemen:	Celebrate the rain
4	Martijn:	Elysium audien

Some rhetorical figure(s) and action(s) in the headline or caption in other posts made a number of different actions conditionally relevant. This is demonstrated in the ING post (see Fig. 5) in which the annual moment of adjusting the time to daylight saving is used to promote a financial product.

Fig. 5. Brand post of ING with the headline: "Don't forget to move the clock".

The picture shows a person moving an antique clock. The headline in the picture contains a verbal trope: "Don't forget to move the clock" (Dutch: "Vergeet niet de klok te verzetten"), which constitutes the action of reminding fans to adjust the time for daylight saving. Together the picture and headline generate a verbo-pictorial trope (i.e., moving the arms of the clock versus moving the clock itself), which presents the fans with a riddle that needs solving. Moreover, in the caption, ING reminds their fans to check their fire and theft insurance[5]: "Tomorrow is summer time! PS. It might be a good thing to check your fire and theft insurance before you move the clock. http://bit.ly/allrisk_inboedel (Dutch: "Morgen gaat de zomertijd weer in! PS. Misschien handig om eerst even je inboedelverzekering te controleren voordat je de klok gaat verzetten http://bit.ly/allrisk_inboedel"). This caption refers back to the person moving an antique clock, suggesting that in case it goes wrong, a fire and theft insurance would have been helpful. What type of response would be conditionally relevant next is also difficult to pinpoint. Reactions show that fans indeed interpret the post in various ways and respond both to the post as well as to each other within the third level of the participation framework, as shown in Excerpt 2.

Excerpt 2: ING ANTIQUE CLOCK (see Fig. 5)

1	Barney:	Don't forget to undo (*move back) the shameless salary raise for
2		the greedy grabbers at the top.
3	Vince:	And this is how they earn some extra >> LINK TO ONLINE ARTICLE
4		'Dutch Central banker fired for nazi cross-dressing'
5	Ed:	What does my fire and theft insurance have to do with moving my clock
6	Maria:	??
7		I really don't get it either.
8		I think it's the clock … well, mine is from the Action[6].
9		Probably won't make a big difference in the premium.. hahahaha
10	Jo:	…
11		Don't you guys see the picture…."moving" the clock. Get it? And before
12		the clock is being moved by someone else (a burglar) it's a pretty good
13		idea to check your fire and theft insurance. And if you don't want to then
14		you just don't. You're not obliged to follow up on advice

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[5] Also translated as 'contents insurance'. In short, this type of insurance insures home owners and renters not only for fire and theft, but also damage to for example furniture in case of an accident in your home.

[6] The Action is a low budget store selling all sorts of goods, including clocks.

Fans show non-understanding by explicitly asking how the fire and theft insurance is related to the time change in line 5 (i.e., the fire and theft insurance is only related to the value of the clock). Additionally, some fans reply negatively by calling the fire and theft insurance a rip-off or by using the time change metaphor to suggest that salary increase of top managers should be "moved back" in lines 1—2 and 3—4. Fans also respond to each other, for example in line 7 when Maria refers to Ed when she says 'either' and in line 11 in which Jo addresses the other commenters with 'you guys.'

In short, rhetorical posts invite participants to interact in various ways. Depending on both the complexity of rhetorical figures and the type of actions done in the picture, caption and/or headline, posts project and receive various types of responses, such as inviting and giving an evaluative response, asking questions and giving answers. When the post becomes unclear or ambiguous by combining several actions (as the ING antique clock post demonstrates) various next actions are made conditionally relevant, and thus fans reply with a variety of next actions. These can sometimes be negative responses. Fans do not only respond to the sender (i.e., the brand), but fans also address each other and start conversations with specific recipients. Some fans explicitly demonstrate how they are trying to understand the rhetoric. The next section discusses what happens when fans do more than what is required in terms of relevant next actions.

4.3. Doing more than is required: a variety of responses to rhetorical Facebook posts

Not all posts make one or multiple next actions clearly relevant. A number of posts only contained a visual rhetorical figure and thus did not make any specific next action conditionally relevant. We know from Facebook interaction amongst friends that such posts do not secure responses from friends (Farina, 2018). This is then the reason that actions in first posts among friends generally do project clear relevant next actions in order to generate a response and thus secure participants (Farina, 2018: 81—82). However, from an advertising perspective a post is a way of attracting attention: by posting it on a social media platform one can assume a post containing a rhetorical post generates likes and positive evaluations. That would then be the potentially conditionally relevant next action. However, as it is difficult to compare visual to spoken interaction in this study, it was difficult to predict what the relevant next action was. We therefore turn to the reactions to see what fans see as a relevant next action. It appeared that posts that only contained a rhetorical figure invited fans to respond in various ways, as can be seen in Excerpt 3.

Excerpt 3: OREO PEARL (see Fig. 2)

1	Joyce:	Oreo at the beach wowie!!
2	Leila:	Carola A. Pazilla
3	Charlotte	Is the pearl also made out of delicious cream?
4	Fahrida	Yammy
5	Cilla	I ♥ Oreos !!!

Fans responded to the visual trope in the Oreo post (see Fig. 2) in various ways. In line 1, a fan interprets the visual metaphor. In line 3, a fan poses a question to the sender (i.e., brand) whilst demonstrating that she has understood the visual metaphor. Furthermore, fans evaluate the message (lines 4 and 5). Finally, the technical affordances of Facebook also allow fans to tag another Facebook member in a reaction as shown in line 2. By tagging, Leila demonstrates a (positive) evaluation: this post is good enough to be shared with friends.

These observations show that when posts do not clearly project a relevant next action, fans respond in all sorts of ways. Therefore, phenomena were examined that went beyond the typical conditionally relevant response Three patterns of responses in the comments that went beyond the expected conditional relevance were found 1) displaying knowledge and (non-)understanding of the rhetorical figure in the post; 2) a personal evaluation on the topic presented in the post, and 3) a negative or positive evaluation of the brand. The first type of response is directly related to the complexity of the rhetoric. The other two types of responses can occur anywhere. In the following subsections these three types of responses are further explained and illustrated.

4.3.1. Displaying knowledge and (non-)understanding of the post

In line with the findings of Ritson and Elliot (1999) and the reasons to engage in discussions mentioned in Hoeken et al. (2009), our data show that fans demonstrate their comprehension of the rhetorical riddle in the posts. Hoeken et al. (2009:59) suggest that recipients "prove one's knowledge status by providing a meaningful interpretation to an implicit message." In the data similar epistemic claims were found in which fans clearly demonstrate their understanding of the rhetorical riddle. Furthermore, fans start interacting with each other on the third level of the participation framework. Fans correct others when they appear to misunderstand the riddle. Also, fans explain the rhetorical message when others ask for clarification. From a marketing perspective, this is interesting; arguably, such lively discussion amongst fans might generate a sense of brand community because fans have discussions with fellow fans about the brands' rhetorical message.

The data show that there is a fine line between a not complex enough riddle, a riddle that is exactly right or a riddle that is too complex. Rhetorical posts that are not complex enough can receive negative ("bashing") messages. Besides, when a post is not

rhetorically complex and also flawed, fans explicitly display their knowledge of both the rhetoric and the brand. The first example is the rhetorical post of Fernandes which contains a flaw according to the fans (see Fig. 3). The post receives a variety of reactions:

Excerpt 4: FERNANDES FAMILY (see Fig. 3)

1	Olaf:	Pink melon and red grape are barely ever available
2	Arabella:	Sure that's important but we're missing a family member 3 fernandes red grape bottles
3		what do you think of that the picture isn't complete at all !!
4	FERNANDES:	Hi Arabella, thanks for the tip!
5	Rob:	Not for sale anywhere anymore in NL … too bad
6	Vikram:	Tried Fernandes pink melon tasted useless, why isn't Fernandes Ginger
7		being produced anymore?
8	Robert:	That's a very tasty family
9	Chanina:	It's not complete

Although some fans simply appreciate the rhetoric (line 8), according to many fans one "family member" is missing (for example see line 2—3 and 9), namely, the red grape bottle (and the cream ginger flavor which apparently isn't available in the Netherlands anymore). Here, a complaint can be observed: fans continue to comment on the missing family member and ask where the cream ginger flavor has gone. This continues even though the brand becomes involved in the third level of the participation framework. The brand replies to these individual messages to thank people for their tip (see line 5). In other words, the responses now move away from the conditionally relevant next action as set out by the brand. The difference with face-to-face reactions based on print advertisements is that reactions on Facebook occur in the semi-public domain and such misunderstandings or 'bashings' can be quickly resolved by others, including the brand itself, through spontaneously generated interaction. At the same time, negative reactions can also amplify each other by elaborating on and continuing the negative sentiment.

A rhetorical riddle that is not too complex often receives not only answers, but also positive evaluations and other types of actions. Despite the fact that many others may have solved the riddle, fans are still inclined to answer the riddle themselves. A rhetorical message that receives lots of "understanding" reactions is the Lipton post in Fig. 1. The cup of tea sits "high" on the building, referring to "high tea". The caption conveys a state of mind (being ready for, or in need of, a high tea) and at the same time asks a question, inviting an answer concerning a (hopefully) similar state of mind as a response ("Are you also so ready for a high tea?").

Excerpt 5: LIPTON HIGH TEA (see Fig. 1)

1	Susan:	Well …. Actually I am !!
2	LIPTON:	Why are you ready for a cosy high tea, Susan? Greetings, Lipton
3	Cynthia:	Yeaa I sure am, with my sweet cousin Tammy Jones
4	Harriette:	Delicious!
5	Lisa:	Nancy Bergman Yu-mae Ping Natalia Smith Jordy Kit Mary O'Donnel Peg Aspen Lisa Shoestring
6	Robin:	Mary, Mathilda, Martha, Kirsten, Daniel and Rose!
7	Mary	Yeaaa! Spontaneously tomorrow? Around 12 pm?
8	Rose:	Great idea!
9	Cyn	The higher the better! Claire Trace Lynn MacDonald Laurel Vine

Besides the expected and conditionally relevant response 'yes or no', or "actually I am" in line 1, this post also receives lots of tags. In other words, fans invite other fans to go for a high tea or share the post with others because they find it amusing, as can be seen in lines 3, 5, 6, and 9. The question is thereby redirected to other Facebook members. Some even respond, as can be seen in line 7, and go beyond simply responding to the post by arranging to meet. Additionally, fans explicitly but subtly show understanding of the rhetorical riddle. Reactions such as "the higher the better" in line 9 in combination with several tags or "yes, somewhere high up in Rotterdam" (not shown here) demonstrate that these fans have understood the point of the cup of tea sitting high up on a high-rise building and at the same time demonstrate appreciation of the rhetoric.

Some rhetorical riddles are too complex. These posts may be explicitly understood by some fans but can receive non-understanding responses from others, such as the ING post discussed in section 4.2. The rhetorical message is complicated due to multiple verbo-rhetorical tropes which remind fans of both the time change and checking one's fire and theft insurance. The reactions show that fans interpret this post in various ways (see excerpt 2). Fans demonstrate explicit under-standing of the rhetorical riddle by laughing ("haha", not shown). At the same time people show non-understanding by explicitly asking how the fire and theft insurance is related to the time change in line 5 (which it is not, the insurance is only related to the value of the clock), or by explicitly requesting a clarification ("I really don't get that either") in line 7. Addi-tionally, some fans reply negatively by using the time change metaphor to suggest that the salary increases at the top level should be "moved back" (just like moving the arms of the clock back 1 h) in line 1. This reaction demonstrates both an understanding of the rhetorical message and a critical view towards the bank. Interesting to note is that this kind of complicated rhetorical message also creates fan—fan sequences in which fans, who assumingly do not know each other, help each other by explaining the rhetorical riddle or comment on each other's jokes or criticism. Thus, the technical affordances of

Facebook (i.e., everyone can see everyone's contributions) can both contribute to the understanding of the verbo-pictorial riddles as well as contribute to a negative evaluation of a (too complex) riddle.

In short, not only do Facebook fans implicitly (for example by responding using a similar rhetorical strategy) and explicitly (for example by complimenting the brand on the rhetorical message) demonstrate "understanding" in their reactions, they also demonstrate non-understanding. The communal aspect of Facebook then creates solutions within the fanbase community: fans help each other by explaining the rhetoric. Compared to print advertisements that are discussed in small groups of friends (see Ritson and Elliott, 1999; Hoeken et al., 2009), Facebook allows everyone to join in the conversation, including the sender itself.

4.3.2. Personal evaluation on the topic presented in the post

Whereas Hoeken et al. (2009:57) suggest that one can "strengthen group identity" by bringing an ad up in conversation, the Facebook data show how fans individually display their own identity in various ways. Fans for example go beyond simply fulfilling the conditionally relevant next action and elaborate with personal opinions, often related to their morals and values. A typical example is the Rabobank post showing a money bill folded up as a shirt hanging on a clothes line, asking "Do you get clothing money, yes or no?". The caption provides some information on the average monthly amount teenagers receive and asks another question: "If you get the option, would you take clothing money?" a pattern of elaborate responses was observed.

Excerpt 6: RABOBANK CLOTHING MONEY (Figure not shown)

1	Steffie:	I used to get 100 euro's in three months
2	Sandra:	No, never got clothing money
3	John:	I teach them to order through amazon.de, you can only spend a euro once,
4		so just order internationally, bad for the Dutch economy, but hey, we'll leave it to the
5		high income people to spend it here, ah yeah, they usually put it away illegally...
6	Mary	Nonsense clothing money every month. You surely don't buy new clothes every month.
7	Johnny:	I don't get clothing nor pocket money I was taught to work for my money
8		and I'm okay with that

Beyond just answering one of the two questions the way Sandra does in line 2, people bring up memories from the past (line 1), share their own views on how they teach their children to spend money (lines 3–5), and provide moral advice for others concerning teenagers "working for money", rather than "getting clothing money" (lines 7–8). With these types of responses, fans voluntarily share their morals and values through opinions, advice, and dismissals. The affordances of Facebook contribute to this voluntary identity display, as these comments can be seen by all other fans that have 'liked' the brand as well as their Facebook friends. This then seems to go beyond discussing "what's hot or not" concerning the brand or the rhetorical advertisement (Hoeken et al., 2009: 59), but allows fans to display their identity concerning topics mentioned in a brand post.

4.3.3. Negative or positive evaluation of the brand

The third type of action that was frequently found in the Facebook data was evaluating the brand (rather than the rhetorical message) positively or negatively. No pattern could be established as to when this occurs. This action seems to be closely related to the popularity of the brand, rather than any interactional features. For example, amongst the Pepsi reactions "coca cola is better" is a frequent response. Also, reactions posted on several Facebook pages of banks suggest that bank directors receive too much salary (also see excerpt 2).

In short, no matter what conditionally relevant next action is evoked by a post (or none at all), no matter how complex (or not) the rhetoric is, negative or positive evaluations of a brand can occur 'out-of-the-blue' and anywhere at any time. As mentioned before, Facebook fans are not held accountable for not producing relevant next actions like in spoken conversations.

4.4. Summary of the analyses

The first analysis showed that posts differ in their rhetorical form (visual, verbal, verbo-pictorial) and that tropes are most frequent in brand posts. Moreover, in almost 50% of the posts verbo-pictorial figures occurred resulting from a complex interplay between the posts' caption and/or headline and picture. The second analysis has shown that some rhetorical messages clearly project a particularly relevant next action, or several relevant next actions, whereas others simply provide a rhetorical puzzle. When a post clearly projects a next action (e.g., asking a question), this is generally followed up by the fans (e.g., giving an answer). Sometimes these actions differ from face-to-face next actions due to the Facebook's technical affordances, i.e., when an invited action is simple (e.g., asking a question) different responses among fans are observed (e.g., tagging, evaluating the brand, displaying identity). When the rhetorical message does not project a clear next relevant action, fans respond in various ways.

However, verbal and/or visual tropes in brand posts can also invite fans to demonstrate their comprehension of the rhetoric in a creative or appreciative manner. This also invites interaction amongst the fans themselves (creating fan–fan

sequences). Fans even help each other understand the rhetoric by explaining it or discussing their opinions with each other as a way to display their (online) identity. This seems to be exactly what brands should wish for when designing their Facebook posts: positive word of mouth on the third level of the participation framework through interaction with the brand itself or with other fans about the post, product, or brand. It is also exactly this level of the participation framework that is most 'out-of-the-hands' of the brand. Remarkably, brands often did not intervene when fans negatively evaluate a brand or a product. Moreover, they also did not engage in conversation when fans did not understand a rhetorical puzzle, allowing fans to discuss a variety of topics that are not related to the brand. In other words, brands can initiate a conversation by posting an ambiguous message but are hardly engaged in the conversation they evoked (however, do see the responses posted by brands in excerpt 4 and 5).

Brands therefore need to balance the complexity of their rhetorical brand posts. Facebook is a platform on which anyone can respond semi-publicly to brand posts. Whereas advertisements on TV or in magazines stop at the second level of the participation framework, Facebook is explicitly designed for liking, sharing, and commenting.

5. Discussion

Our research has provided insights into new ways in which the marketing activities of brands occur in a complex multi-party online environment. The analyses showed that brands communicate indirect claims about their product using multiple rhetorical figures in Facebook posts. These ambiguous messages project several conditionally relevant next actions, but fans' responses also went beyond these expected actions. Conversations are sparked by posts containing all sorts of rhetorical figures (tropes, schemes) and forms (verbal, pictorial, verbo-pictorial), performing different actions and make other actions conditionally relevant (or make no action relevant at all). By sparking conversations, participation is created. Contrary to Farina's (2018) findings amongst Facebook friends, Facebook brand page first posts do not need to project clear relevant next actions. Rather, rhetorical messages without a clear projected next action also secure recipient responses. At the same time, just like friends' first posts, brands need to think about how they design their messages as they have "no control over the positioning of their first comments [by fans] in comment threads" (Farina, 2018:39).

In some cases, the rhetorical design of brand post had a positive impact on the interaction. For example, the brand post of Lipton (Fig. 1) generated conditionally relevant next actions. In their comments, fans answered the question that was posed in the post's caption and showed understanding of the rhetorical riddle. Moreover, fans invited other fans to go for a high tea by tagging them in their comments. It can be concluded that in this case the technological affordances of Facebook increased the amount of interaction this brand post generated. However, there were also cases in which the rhetorical design of a brand post had a negative impact on the interaction. For example, in the brand post of ING (Fig. 5) the brand message was aligned with a public event that was of topical interest (i.e., reminding fans to adjust the time for daylight saving as well as reminding fans to check their insurance when moving). The reactions showed that fans interpret the post in various ways. Fans demonstrated non-understanding by explicitly asking how the insurance is related to the time change. Moreover, fans replied by critiquing the bank. This example showed that fans can hijack the semi-public conversation, from which it can be concluded that brands should pay attention to the types of actions the picture, caption and/or headline alone and in combination communicate. However, negative evaluations can occur despite the conditionally relevant action projected by the post or the complexity of the rhetorical figure in the post. A way to deal with negative word of mouth is by engaging in webcare (Van Noort and Willemsen, 2012) in which a brand representative engages in a private online conversation with the fan. Their research showed that proactive webcare interventions on brand-generated platforms, such as Facebook brand pages, are likely to engender positive effects when responding to negative word of mouth.

Considering the fast increase of social media platforms and interfaces, it is necessary to develop methods that can be applied to examine both current and emerging social and digital media and the mediated interaction they generate. The mixed-methods approach that was applied in this study is a useful way of studying social media interaction. In order to understand how rhetorical brand posts stimulate interaction amongst fans, it was necessary to examine what kind of rhetorical messages brands posted. After quantifying how often visual, verbal, and verbo-pictorial tropes and schemes occurred in the small sample, it was examined how they related to the actions the post produced and how fans respond to these actions in their comments.

Using mixed methods seems to be a step in the right direction, but, like Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2014) suggest, it is necessary to start designing natively digital methods. Also, Giles et al. (2017) articulate the "need for a methodologically pluralistic outlook in understanding the complex interpretative world of digital culture" (p. 40). Combining thorough analyses of the post and fans' actions allowed understanding of how various types of rhetorical messages are understood in this specific digital space. Although the applied interactional approach provides insights into how fans engage with Facebook posts, the analysis only focusses on short interactions, mostly between the brand post and multiple fans. However, given the purpose of this study, the authentic data showed how fans responded to rhetorical messages.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated how brands use rhetorical strategies in Facebook brand posts and which type of interaction they sparked. The analyses showed that these brand posts contain multiple rhetorical figures in the picture, headline and/or

caption that generate complex rhetorical messages, inviting fans to invest cognitive effort to arrive at the intended meaning of the post. Not only do fans respond to the invited action, they also solve rhetorical riddles, help others solve the riddle, demonstrate their understanding and appreciation of the rhetorical message, discuss topics brought up by the posts, and finally complain. The types of interaction that these posts generate, the types of topics discussed, and whether posts generate fan—fan interactions can provide brands with insights into how, when, and why they spark different types of conversations.

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