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Collective Memories, Imaginary Geographies and Brand Identities in the New Russia: The Case of AB-InBev's 'Siberian Crown' lager

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In *How Brands Become Icons* (2004), Holt shows the different ways in which certain brands draw on cultural imagery, myths, and history to create identity. In so doing, brands both construct and co-opt a mythical 'elsewhere' involving 'collective memories', and 'imaginary geographies'. The question remains as to how this process operates in countries such as Russia, where the politics of identity are particularly contentious, and 'collective memories' are often hotly disputed. Another issue concerns the contribution social media can make in this area, since they constitute a tremendous opportunity for brands to construct the narratives that Holt suggest lie at the heart of brand-making mythology. In order to begin to address this dual gap in the literature, we propose a conceptual paper, based on a case study of one specific Russian brand, AB-Inbev's 'Siberian Crown'. This brand is chosen first because of the specific challenges it faces in the market place, and second on account of the particular strategy it adopts to overcome them. As we show, this strategy involves using Facebook in order, first, to install beer as Russia's new national drink, and second, to establish itself as the ultimate Russian beer brand. Our paper's contribution lies most importantly in the way it extends Holt's work on iconic brands into virtual and non-Western contexts. Given our findings, more work needs to be done on the ways in which social media can help brands manage meaning during turbulent times – not just in Russia but in a wide variety of markets.

Mots clés : Social media, iconic brands, myth, Russia, nostalgia, beer

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Keywords

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Introduction

In *How Brands Become Icons* (2004), Holt shows the different ways in which certain brands draw on cultural imagery, myths, and history to create identity. Over time, through the use of a variety of cultural intermediaries, such as pop stars or TV shows, brands become associated with specific values. In other words, they exploit the politics of identity to generate legitimacy and build brand image. In so doing, they both construct, and co-opt collective memories. .As Holt puts it, Coca-Cola, Budweiser, Nike and Jack Daniel's 'are imbued with stories that consumers find valuable in constructing their identities' (2004: 3-4). This question is especially interesting in the case of the BRICS emerging economies. In countries such as these, the politics of identity can be particularly contentious, since collective memories and geographic boundaries are still very much in the process of being reconstructed. Scholars such as Mazzarella 2003 (India) and Wang 2006 (China) have begun to address this gap in the literature. Yet there is still virtually nothing on how brands construct - and exploit - collective memories in Russia. This topic holds much promise for researchers, as demonstrated by the recent pioneering studies on the politics of branding in Russia by Morris (2007) and Kravets (2012).

Another aspect of branding absent both from Holt's book, and from others on the topic (see for example Lury, 2004; Arvidsson, 2006) concerns the use of social media. This is especially regrettable, since as Lury (2011) observes, one of the key issues at stake in branding today is the role of the consumer in the creation of brand value. Nowhere is this seen more clearly, we would argue, than on social media networks, where consumers have the chance to engage in public dialogue with brands, either by 'liking' – or 'disliking' - items posted by brand managers, by commenting directly on these posts, or by sharing them with other Internet users. While such sites constitute a tremendous opportunity for brands (Kaplan and Haenlain, 2011; Kaplan and Haenlain, 2012; Yan, 2011), they also present significant challenges, not least in the possibility they offer consumers to wrest control over brand meaning away from marketing managers (Denegri-Knott, Zwick and Schroeder, 2006; Chrisodoulides, 2009; Fournier and Avery, 2011; Champoux, Durgee and McGlynn 2012).

Furthermore, while social media marketing has begun to attract considerable scholarly interest, relatively little work has been done on how brands use such networks in emerging markets such as Russia and the former USSR (see Miazhevich 2012). We propose to begin to address this dual gap in the literature, by looking at the social media strategy of one particular Russian brand.

Methodology

Since our interest lies overwhelmingly in on the identity politics of branding in Russia, and on the 'semiotic ideologies' of one brand in particular (Manning, 2012, following Keane, 2003), we use a visual studies methodology, following Schroeder (2002), Moore (2003) and Manning (2010), rather than 'netnography' (Kozinets, 2006). At this stage, we are primarily concerned with the strategy used by that brand in difficult times, rather than how consumers respond to that strategy (although the two are, of course, closely interrelated). For practical reasons, and also in order to ensure thematic coherence, we will restrict ourselves to the alcohol sector. Furthermore, we take a case-study approach. The main focus of our paper will be the Facebook page of the beer 'Siberian Crown'. Our reason for focusing on 'Siberian Crown' is that it offers insights into the challenges brands are currently facing, and their strategies for dealing with them. 'Siberian Crown''s challenges are threefold. First, the market is over-saturated. Since the early 1990s there has been a massive influx of foreign brands onto the Russian market. Second, brand loyalty is notoriously low among Russian consumers. This does not mean, however, that Russian consumers have become cynical towards advertisers' claims, as they have in many Western countries. On the contrary. The alcoholic beverages market, like most retail sectors, is enjoying exponential growth in Russia, and this brings us (somewhat paradoxically) to the third challenge facing brands in that country today. As the Russian authorities seek to curb growing alcoholism and a concomitant demographic crisis in the country, certain alcoholic beverages, such as beer, have recently been the target of draconian advertising and retailing restrictions (see for example Schultz, 2012).

Analysis

It could also be argued, as does Manning (2012), that beer is the ultimate collective tipple (at least for men). This is especially true in the West, where male (and an increasing number of female) adolescents force themselves to 'acquire a taste' for beer – which after all is often 'bitter', at lest in the UK - in order to enjoy the drink's psycho-social benefits, namely the opportunity it affords them to feel that they belong to the group. To refuse to drink beer is to run the risk of exclusion from the group, as the character Andy nearly finds to his cost in the recent film *The World's End* (directed by Edgar Wright in 2013). This socio-cultural connotation of beer is by no means confined to Western Europe, however – which may be one reason why it has become so closely associated with national identity not just in Russia but in other ex-Soviet republics, such as Georgia (Manning and Uplisashvili, 2007). Manning (2012: 206) refers to the countless 'beer-mediated masculine solidarities' enacted on a daily basis in the former Soviet republic of Georgia, for example (on Russia, see also Morris, 2007). Many Russian companies may view associating themselves with 'Russian-ness' as an effective way of meeting the challenges posed by the recent influx of foreign brands (as Manning has also suggested in the case of Georgia; 2012: 205).

Before proceeding further, we should explain the terms we use here. By 'collective memories', we what we understand those memories constructed through what Zeruvabel calls 'commemorative narratives and rituals in contemporary social life' (1995: 3). The concept of 'imaginary geographies' perhaps needs more of an explanation. It goes back to Said (1978), who originally used it in the singular to refer to the way in which the 'Orient' has historically been constructed as the exotic 'other' in the Western cultural imagination (in the specific context of post-Soviet identity, see also Clowes, 2011). More recently, Said's concept has been especially fruitfully exploited by Manning (2012), in reference to that most iconic of English drinks, gin. As Manning points out, referring to the deeply colonialist associations that the drink holds for may even today, several decades after the sun has set

on the British Empire, 'gin bears the afterimage of an orientalist imaginary geography […], its erstwhile sphere of circulation and consumption, which is now a lost, nostalgic world found mostly on the labels of gin bottles.' Manning's point, however – and this is crucial to our argument – is that *all* alcoholic drinks function in this manner, not just gin. He continues: '[d]rinks […] construct elsewheres within space and time, imaginary geographies that make their consumption meaningful in a way that transcends here and now' (2012: 20).

If, as we shall see, Siberian Crown marshals so many collective memories and generates so imaginary a geography on its social media pages, it is first and foremost in order to mythologize itself as a brand. We follow Barthes (1973) here, for whom myths are second-order systems of meaning which emerge from first-order pairings of signifier and signified (for an excellent review of the literature on branding as myth, see Brown, McDonagh and Schultz II, 2013). Barthes is especially important for his insistence on the culturally specific aspect of myth, an idea echoed in Slotkin's work on the construction of the notion of the American West (on Slotkin's relevance to brand mythology, see Thompson 2004). According to Slotkin, myth rests on a particular duality; while it involves the expression of fundamental human aspirations, it relies for that expression on culturally specific iconography (what Yury Lotman calls a culture's 'semiosphere', i.e. 'the whole semiotic space of the culture in question'; 1990: 124-25). As far as mythmaking is concerned, Russia is an extremely interesting case; since the late Soviet era, the myth of the bright new future has progressively been replaced by that of the glorious past (see for example Boym, 2001; Morris, 2007; Oushakine, 2007; Kravets, 2012; Roberts 2014). Indeed, in the country, recent political debate about Russian national identity has seen the emergence of certain key 'founding myths of the Russian nation' (Brundny, 2013), which serve precisely the function of myth highlighted by Slotkin. In particular, Brundny argues (2013: 139) that what he calls 'the imperial conception of Russian national identity' that lay at the heart of Soviet ideology is well and truly alive today. Furthermore, he maintains 'surveys consistently show the spread of illiberal, imperial, anti-market, and xenophobic notions of Russian identity in Russian society that bear a striking resemblance to nationalist and

national-socialist notions of Russia's identity' (2013: 139: see also Apel, 2006).

There are those who would wish to water down Brundny's point. Nevertheless, such notions are reflected in the marketing campaigns of a number of the country's beers, which mythologize Russia, presenting it both as heroic past and as limitless expanse. While Morris (2007) has highlighted this tendency in television advertisements, it is also a feature of the social media pages of a number of Russian beer brands. The beer brand which does this most extensively, however, is 'Siberian Crown' ('Sibirskaya korona'). This brand will be our focus for the rest of this paper. The brand is a market leader in Russia, and was voted 'No. 1 beer in Russia' in 2007 and 2009 (http://www.suninbev.ru/brands/sibkor). It was launched at a local brewery, 'Rosar' in the Siberian city of Omsk in 1996, before being acquired by Russian brewer SUN Inbev in 1999. SUN Inbev in turn became part of the brand portfolio of the Belgian-Brazilian Anheuser Busch-Inbev group in 2005. According to SUN Inbev's Russian company website, 'The brand's contemporary image is based on concepts such as quality, style, pride in one's country, prosperity, generosity of spirit, and nobility' (http://www.suninbev.ru/brands/sibkor). In the early to mid 2000s it advertised aggressively in an attempt to transform itself from a regional, into a national brand. To quote Morris (2007: 1399): ' [During this campaign] Siberian Crown (Sibirskaya korona), another low-end brew, presented Imperial Russia in all its luxurious glory: candle-lit balls, splendid military uniforms and the Russian tricolour flying from every available pole'.

Since June 2012 the brand has accelerated its transition from a regional to a national brand. And it has done so not by intensifying its advertising campaign, but instead thanks to a rather extraordinary use of social media pages. These pages – both on Facebook, where it currently has just over 7,500 'friends' and vkontakte[1], where it has more than 25,000 - are updated on an almost daily basis with facts, images and quotations all designed to make the viewer feel proud to be Russian. The title of both pages is 'The Map of Russian Pride' ('Karta rossiiskoi gordosti'), which echoes its advertising slogan, 'There's something to feel proud

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[1] Vkontakte is a Russian social media platform similar in design to Facebook. It currently has more than three times the number of unique users in Russia than Facebook (40 million as against approximately 12 million: Fernandes, 2012)

about'. ('Est' chem gorditsya').   These pages are virtually identical. For the sake of simplicity, we will focus here on the Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/gordostrossii?fref=ts), although we shall look at the corresponding vkontakte page in order to highlight any significant differences that may exist.

On this page, launched on 1 April 2012, one finds countless photographs of, and quotations by, Russian and Soviet military heroes, artists, writers, scientists, cosmonauts and politicians (some very famous, others rather less so). Even foreign figures, are included, if they contribute to the central purpose of the page – to extol the virtues of the Russian national character, to celebrate the country's glorious past, and to make the viewer feel 'proud' to be Russian. These include Churchill, and his famous quotation to the effect that Russia is 'a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma'. These foreign figures are mostly French, however, which reflects the fact that France holds a particular place in Russian national consciousness as the locus of 'good taste'. De Gaulle praises French courage,, author Frédéric Beigbeder lauds the beauty of Russian women, while in August 2013, Gérard Depardieu, the ink on his new Russian passport still wet, could be read claiming 'one needs to be very strong to be a Russian'.

Innumerable acts of heroism are recounted, such as that of an Orthodox priest bravely defying his captors in the first Chechen War. There are also countless images of natural features, such as Lake Baikal, or man-made structures, such as the fountains at Peterhof, just outside Saint Petersburg, or the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics stadium. No opportunity is lost to compare Russia favourably with the West – we learn, for example, that Moscow's Ostankino TV tower is much higher than New York's Empire State Building. Russia, we are told, has not only more ice-breakers than any other country in the world, but also more students in full-time higher education than many Western European countries. Recent months have seen the launch of several mini-series, such as 'Only in Russia' (in which we learn that Mariya (Tatyana) Pronchisheva was the first woman to explore the Arctic (in the eighteenth century), or 'Sporting Pride', where we may read all about the exploits of for example champion boxer Alex Karelin. The 'Siberian Crown' page makes little or no

distinction between Soviet and pre-Soviet eras. For example, on 17 February 2013, there was a quotation from 19th-century Russo-Ukrainian writer Nikolay Gogol ('thank God you're Russian'), next to a reference to the cosmodrome at Baikonur and the exploits of Yury Gagarin.

Most tendentiously of all, in the summer of 2013, the brand published dozens of photographs of citizens from its home city of Omsk, holding up placards claiming the city as the capital of 'Eurasia'. This is an allusion to the physiographical entity that is the single continental mass of Europe and Asia. It can also be read, however, as a reference to President Putin's oft-repeated desire to see Russia at the head of a new empire, an Eastern geopolitical alliance to counterbalance Western (and particularly US) socio-economic hegemony (although the idea was first put forward by Kazakhstan's president Nazarbayev in a speech in Moscow in 1994). In October 2011, Putin first suggested creating a 'Eurasian' political union which would bring together the former Soviet republics of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The 'Eurasian Union' may have recently become a geopolitical reality, with the signing in November 2011 of an agreement by the presidents of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, setting a target of establishing a Eurasian Union by 2015 (in September 2013, Armenia also expressed a desire to join), and the inaugural meeting of the Eurasian Commission (modelled on the European Commission) in January 2012. Nevertheless, from a purely geographical perspective, 'Eurasia' does not officially exist. It is no more real than the 'lost' world of Atlantis. As the dream of only the most extreme kind of Russian nationalist, it is a geopolitical construct of the most ephemeral kind. In that sense, it is perhaps the ultimate 'imaginary geography'.

As one scrolls through the pages of the 'Map of Russian Pride', one has constantly to pinch oneself to ensure one remembers that what we are looking at are the social media pages of a brand of beer, rather than the website of an extreme right-wing Russian political party.. This need became even greater throughout 2013, as the brand has added a series of sub-pages to its social media sites, each one closely associated to one particular aspect of Russian, or Soviet, national identity. In April, for example, a special page was created to

commemorate Cosmonauts' Day (12 April). This information is contained in sections devoted to technological innovations achieved thanks to space exploration (such as plastic packaging), the animals which have been sent into space, the first astronauts, various space vessels, the scientists and thinkers whose discoveries were ultimately to make space travel possible, and various space-related facts, such as the speed at which the earth rotates. If, to paraphrase Yurchak (1999: 92), the conquest of space was central to the Soviet mythology of the Bright Future, then another of the brand's sub-pages is very much focused on the country's glorious military past. It is devoted to the Russian Navy Day, celebrated on the last Sunday in July ever since it was inaugurated in 1939. The choice of the navy, rather then another branch of the Russian military such as the paratroopers (who have their own 'day', on 23 August), is not of course neural. For one thing, it provides a link with the greatest tsar of all, Peter the Great, who founded the Russian navy at the end of the seventeenth-century. It was with Peter that began Russian leaders' historical obsession to capture and maintain the ice-free ports without which mastery of the seas would remain a pipe dream. Indeed, since the break-up of the USSR, Russia has a number of such ports, on the Baltic and the Black Sea. Then there is the fact that the country's nuclear-powered submarines helped it maintain the balance of power during the Cold War. Not surprisingly, then, Soviet-era submarines feature here, as do many other aspects of the country's navy, past and present - flags, ships, battles, technological innovations, even the cost of a sailor's rations in the Soviet era. In a manner recalling the use of packaging by certain Russian brands (Roberts, 2014), all countermemories that might not concord with the hegemonic view of the Great Russian Nation are effaced on these pages. The 'monologic' (Bakhtin 1981) character of 'Siberian Crown''s social media branding is a subject to which we shall return shortly.

Discussion

In our introduction, we mentioned the nationalistic branding of beer in the former Soviet republic of Georgia, and we should like to return to this point before drawing our conclusions. Manning (2012: 206) makes the important following point:

> Georgian beer marketers have domesticated and 'traditionalized' both 'beer' and 'brand', grounding their domestic brands of beer in ethnographic images of the Goergian nation inherited from socialist and pre-socialist ethnography, using ethnographic images of Georgian tradition.

Manning is referring primarily to packaging and advertising, and to the habit various brands have of using old images of brewing techniques. In the case of 'Siberian Crown''s Facebook page, what is remarkable is that the ethnographic images come to dominate to such an extent that the brand almost completely disappears (there is, however, the unsubstantiated, and difficultly verifiable, claim that the first brewers were eastern Slavs in the 5th century BC). There is virtually nothing, either textual or visual, to link the page to the brand.

In his ground-breaking article on Russian cigarette advertising in the Yeltsin era, Morris makes the following comment: 'both Russian and multinational companies have attempted to connect the brand identity of products to national origin and national identity' (2005, 660). Our study suggests that this phenomenon is just as much a feature of post-socialist Russian social media sites as it is of advertising – at least where beer is concerned. Since the collapse of the USSR, and especially since the rise to power of Vladimir Putin, a number of alcohol brands have positioned themselves around the myth of the Great Russian Past (Kravets 2012, Roberts 2014). In an unpredictable age, Russia emerges as the ultimate umbrella brand, a welcome source of reliability and reassurance for the Russian consumer in today's troubled times (see Sabonis-Chafee, 1999). Reproducing and representing political discourses in the broader public sphere, brands such as 'Siberian Crown' resemble Douglas Holt's 'iconic brands' (2006: 374), in as much as they behave like 'mercenaries, following ideological demands wherever the action is' (see also Kravets and Örge, 2010). All countermemories that might not concord with the hegemonic view of the

Great Russian Past are simply effaced, in a way radically different from what has happened in, say, commercial representation of the US South (see Thompson and Tian, 2008).

The 'Map of Russian Pride' Facebook page uses specifically Russian iconography - in an unequivocal attempt to appeal to Russian consumers' nostalgic (not to say nationalistic) belief in their country's great past. At the same time, it may also serve to reinforce their belief in the possibility of a bright new future, a new imperial age. It is very hard not to see the re-emergence of Russian national symbols and myths as an expression of what Boym (2001) calls 'restorative nostalgia'. In uncertain times, Boym argues, restorative nostalgia 'proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps' (2001, 41). Such nostalgia works for Boym rather like myth for Lévi-Strauss (1968), who argues that mythical thought helps to resolve the tension between on the one hand our idea of the world, and on the other our practical, everyday experience of that world.

We are not suggesting, of course, that this appeal to nostalgia is part of a concerted political programme (see Oushakine, 2007). Rather it stems from a recognition of the fact that, as Peñaloza observes in her study of consumers' experience of a stock show and rodeo in the American mid-West (2001: 370): 'all cultures have creation myths, they are important for cultural members in working through complex realities'. 'Siberian Crown' uses social media to evoke the myth of the Great Russian Nation. Having virtually no history of its own as a brand, it reconstructs Russian history, and then re-appropriates that history in order to build legitimacy for itself as a brand. This can be read as an attempt to transform the 'symbolic capital' of Russian history into 'economic capital' (Bourdieu 1984). The ultimate object of this mythmaking exercise, however, is to reconstruct one particular kind of 'imagined community' – the nation (Anderson, 2006) – in order to build another, similarly 'imagined' community around the brand – a community of consumers. 'Siberian Crown' weaves endless narratives around the notion of 'Russian-ness' in order to create a sense of community among consumers, one resting on 'a shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility', as Muñiz and O'Guinn put it (2001: 412). Such a community, as Schau, Muñiz and Arnould (2009) and others have argued, can be a

considerable source of added value for the brand, not least by buttressing its legitimacy in the eyes of consumers themselves. However, the monologic nature of the brand's engagement with its consumers on social media is unlikely to produce the kind of genuinely dialogic exchange on which 'brand communities' ultimately depend for their long-term sustainability (Amine and Sitz, 2007, Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012, Aaker, 2013, Wirth et al., 2013). If as Chrisodoulides argues (2009: 142), 'post-internet branding is about facilitating conversations about the brand', it must also surely be about enabling meaningful exchange to take place *between* the brand and consumers (for an alternative view, however, see Cova and Pace, 2006).

Conclusion

The primary function of 'Siberian Crown''s Facebook and vkontakte pages is to help reposition the brand from obscure provincial brew to nothing less then a – *the* – national brand. Enlisting a seemingly endless range of Russian cultural icons, 'Siberian Crown' wants in effect to turn itself into a cultural icon. There are very interesting parallels with US whiskey brand Jack Daniel's here. In an article specifically on Jack Daniel's, Holt argued that it is typical of brands which not only reflect dominant ideology in society, but also have an impact on that ideology. In other words, brands are not passive reflectors of ideological change; they also contribute to that change. They do so precisely through their reproduction of myth. As Holt puts it, in a comment which could just as easily refer to today's Russia as to the US (2006: 375):

> Modern myths work to naturalize the status quo, containing otherwise destabilizing changes in society. In the alchemy of myth, social contradictions are transformed to cultural tensions, which are readily mended by the therapeutic salve of a 'truthful' parable. Social and political problems in the USA have been increasingly managed through mythmaking and consumption, rather than through democratic debate. We are moving further away from Habermas's ideal of rational discourse in the public sphere, not closer. Mythmaking has expanded from a more delimited role as one mode of cultural expression to the country's foundational cultural architecture, a myth society if you will. Iconic brands play a specialized role in this myth society. […] While other types of icons [such as John Wayne or Michael Jordan] serve as the nation's ideological artists, crafting myths to fit the ideological needs of the day, iconic brands are the tireless proselytizers, diffusing these myths into every nook and cranny of everyday life.

In effect, 'Siberian Crown' uses Facebook in an attempt to become the Jack Daniel's of Russia. In other words, it seeks both to install beer as Russia's national drink in the place of vodka, and to establish Siberian Crown as the iconic example of that national drink. The parallels between the mythical branding Jack Daniel's and 'Siberian Crown' are, we believe, too obvious to overlook here – especially since, as Holt himself points out (2006: 360), the US whiskey brand has itself undergone a transition from obscure regional beverage to national drink. 'Siberian Crown' not only mythologizes Russia and the Russian past, however; it also helps construct the identity of consumers, since it appeals to consumers' collective sense of self (Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012). To paraphrase Fehérváry (2009, 429), the 'Map of Russian Pride' materialises social relationships, even as it 'dematerialises' the brand itself. One might even say, following Miller (1987), that it 'objectifies' collective memories and national identity (on the Internet as a form of 'objectification', see also Miller, 2010: 118). The narrative of Russian history, then, becomes intertwined not only with the fiction that is the 'Siberian Crown' brand, but also with the personal narratives of that brand's consumers. And as Giddens (1991: 54) reminds us, a person's identity lies first and foremost in her capacity to 'keep a particular narrative going'. In other words, to share a post on the 'Siberian Crown' Facebook page is – consciously or unconsciously - to buy into a discourse both about Russia as a nation, and about one's own identity *as a Russian* (on the emergence of the 'aggregated self' on brands' social media, see also Belk, 2013).

In today's Web 2.0 world, social relations are mediated more than ever through signs (Baudrillard, 1988). This applies not just to relations between consumers, as Baudrillard originally suggested in the late 1960s, but also, and increasingly, between consumers and the brand. One of the key questions for brands, then, is how to manage the way in which consumers process these images - and indeed use their own images - in order to construct the brand's meaning (Allen, Fournier and Miller, 2008, Fournier and Avery, 2011, Wirth et al., 2013). Chrisodoulides (2009) may well argue that in today's 'post-internet' age, brand managers are increasingly stepping back and letting consumers take control of that process.

Our study of 'Siberian Crown's social media strategy suggests, however, that when faced with difficult market conditions, many brands are far from enthusiastic about ceding power. On the contrary, this particular brand at least has shown itself remarkably keen to use social media in order to impose its own meaning on consumers in a way which leaves no room whatsoever for negotiation. In the light of our discussion, more work clearly needs to be done on the role social media can play in branding, both in legitimizing the brand and in promoting myths of national identity – not just in Russia but in a wide variety of markets.

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