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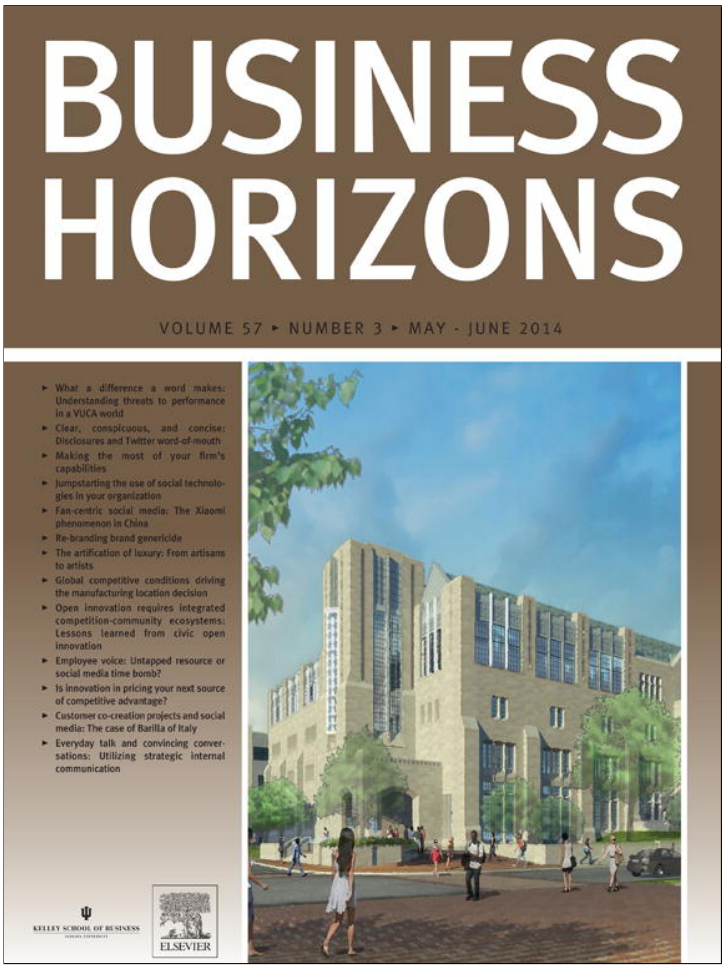

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Re-branding brand genericide

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Abstract Genericide refers to situations where brands lose their legal protections due to the fact that their original name has become the generic term for a new category of products in the market that the brand first helped to create. Despite notorious instances of brands falling prey to this curse, marketing specialists—unlike lawyers—generally do not consider that the widespread use of a brand name represents any real danger and instead view it as a sign of brand strength. Herein, we take a new look at this debate, using a case study of Google to re-investigate the phenomenon of genericide. The article also offers managerial guidance on the most effective ways of developing genericization and avoiding genericide. It concludes by pointing out the need for brand managers to precisely differentiate between different types of brands and markets when deciding whether they should protect themselves from the risk of genericide or else encourage the genericization of their brand.

1. Genericide in a brand society

"Genericide usually occurs as a result of a trademark owner's failure to police the mark, resulting in widespread usage by competitors" (Walsh, 2013, p. 161). North American lawyers introduced the expression 'genericide' in the 1980s (Graham & Peroff, 1987) to qualify the death[1] of brands that have become generic for a new category of products. Yet despite becoming a topic of great interest to legal scholars (Taylor & Walsh, 2002; Walsh, 2013), genericide never seemed very important to marketing specialists, who have produced little research in this field (Moore, 2003; Oakenfull & Gelb, 1996). Even within the world of business, there is a great deal of ambivalence about the risk of genericide: marketing specialists barely believe in this and consider that the widely disseminated use of a brand name is a sign of success, whereas lawyers fear that the same thing might completely hollow out a brand's value.

Brand managers struggle to determine whether lawyers have had a deluded view of genericide in recent decades or if the warning signals that they have been sending out are in fact justified. The answer to this question is increasingly conditioned by dramatic shifts in brands' relationships with the different actors in today's 'brand society' (Kornberger, 2010): consumers and retailers, but also bloggers, employees, and other parties that

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[1] The suffix '-cide' meaning the action of killing something.

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influence the brand. Today, brands are increasingly reaching out beyond their own borders to engage with a variety of risks and threats—an expanded scope requiring closer monitoring of their legal and marketing practices (Nakassis, 2013). The question then becomes: When should legal opinions assume greater importance than the opinions held by a company's marketing specialists, and can any compromise be found between the two?

This article's analysis begins with the arguments first advanced by the lawyers who were responsible for formulating the construct of genericide. It goes on to determine—notably through a case study involving the Nescafé brand—how marketing managers position their brands to avoid the risk of genericide. The next section looks at the question of whether genericide is a delusion or threat and applies it to a case study of the Google brand. Based on this case study, the article offers brand management executives, practitioners, and students a roadmap to help them determine when they should use marketing actions supporting genericization as opposed to legal actions against genericide—or a combination of the two.

2. The heartbreak of genericide, as formulated by lawyers

Legal specialists began alerting companies about the risks of their brands' genericization leading to possible genericide (Table 1) approximately 3 decades ago. In a seminal book on the management and evaluation of brands—coordinated in 1987 by John Murphy, founder of Interbrand—there was already one chapter dedicated to brands' legal dimension (Graham & Peroff, 1987); it highlighted the fact that trademarks should be used as adjectives and not as names. Wrangler offered a simple example of this with its slogan "Get into Wrangler jeans now!" This was considered acceptable use whereas "Get into Wranglers now!" was not. In this latter case, a so-called genericization process was at work (Clankie, 2005), one that progressively transformed what had been a proper noun into a common noun to the point of eliminating its legal protection and causing genericide. One notorious case is the board game Monopoly, which was declared a generic brand in 1983 by a North American court because it had been proven that consumers were using the word 'monopoly' to refer to games of this kind in general and not to the specific product made by Parker Brothers, which held title to the Monopoly trademark. The process does not necessarily have reflexive subjects but it does involve a number of market actors and is mainly explained by the fact that there weren't any names specifying the object previously. Similar examples include Kleenex, Gummi Bears, and Astroturf. The product categories in question had not existed previously, causing the so-called antonomasic use of these brand names. A specific name becomes an antonomasia when it is used to describe things with similar characteristics, such as 'Don Juan,' which has become synonymous with a seducer of women. With the loss of legal protection, all subsequent products—even those of lesser quality—could legally use the first mover's brand name. One consequence would be a collapse in the first mover's value. After all, if all vacuum cleaners are hoovers and all soft drinks are colas—and if consumers perceive them as such—there is little reason to pay more for the Hoover or Coca-Cola brands.

In actual fact, genericide is a legal doctrine seeking to combat the loss of legal protections of brands characterized by a high degree of genericness. According to the 1946 Lanham Act and 1988 Trademark Revision Act—largely inspired by the fight against any kind of sectorial monopoly—legal ownership of a commercial brand can be purely and simply abolished if there is proof that consumers use it generically. The end result is a degeneration of the brand, meaning that the company loses any and all rights to it. Lawyers have therefore formulated the concept of genericide to protect companies and create jurisprudence that is more favorable to the efforts and investments being made to launch and

Table 1. Terminology

Genericization refers to a largely involuntary linguistic and social process (Clankie, 2005) where the name of a brand tends to become the generic name for the category of products to which it belongs.
Genericness means the ability of a brand name to represent a category of products through the encoding of certain properties (Taylor & Walsh, 2002). The genericness of a brand name can be assessed at the time of its registration. Note that this can be particularly strong when a name is closely connected to a product's functionality but also during the rest of its life depending on how the brand name is used in common parlance.
Genericide is the final stage of the process of genericization, where the disappearance of legal protection is sanctioned for a brand that has become generic, in line with legal principles (Oakenfull & Gelb, 1996).

promote corporate brands. With the concept of genericide, lawyers have transformed brand genericization into something that is harmful and dangerous, tantamount to an unauthorized private appropriation. This goes well beyond the spirit of the Lanham Act or Trademark Revision Act. It is the heart of the doctrine of genericide and key to understanding the multiple nature of legal publications in this field along with their ambition of influencing jurisprudence. With this doctrine, it is the consumers, distributors, and media that are the accused, whereas companies are the victims, even if they bear some responsibility for their plight (see Table 2). A lawyer's job is to alert companies about potential risks of genericide and protect brand capital by all possible legal means—thereby creating a great market for legal advice! Legal journals are full of examples of companies defending trademarks against the risk of genericide.

Working together with the companies concerned, much of the business that lawyers generate involves the implementation of the means to avoid genericide by keeping any genericization process from starting. This involves a battle against all unauthorized uses of brand names by individuals whose intentions are not necessarily harmful (Walsh, 2013). In other words, this is not only a way of trapping perpetrators legally but above all a process for educating all of the actors who are, for the most part, unaware of the problem of genericide. Toward this end, companies will sometimes go as far as to develop advertising campaigns similar to the one that Rank Xerox used to warn people: "When you say 'Xerox' in the same way as you say 'aspirin,' you're giving us a headache" (2003 campaign); "When you use 'Xerox' in the same way that you use 'zipper,' you're leaving our brand protection wide open" (2007 campaign). More generally, companies try to use their website to educate intermediaries, consumers, and even employees about the dangers of genericide. A good example of this educational process is Jacuzzi Brands Inc., a global leader in hydro-massage. The company uses its website to ask intermediary resellers and professional customers (e.g., hotels, spas) to help protect its trademarks' value and integrity by obeying specific directives

Table 2. Many defendants accused of genericide

First category of defendants: Consumers
Consumers have a key role to play in genericide. Companies might supply the socio-technical resources (the object and its brand name) that are necessary for this transformation into a common noun, but it is the consumers who through their daily linguistic practices appropriate the name and turn it into something generic. This rarely involves a conscious strategy but stems from individuals' daily practices. The proliferation of online blogs and social networks has had a multiplier effect on common language's appropriation of brands (Moore, 2003). It is not quite the same thing as creative hijacks but more of a case of names progressively assuming the kinds of referential properties that daily activities require. One example is the use of the word 'tweet' to refer to any short informative message posted online by a service transmitting this information to subscribers.

Second category of defendants: Media and dictionaries
The unauthorized use of brand names is often a case of the written press, radio, or television jumping on a new linguistic bandwagon. Following this, dictionaries often start behaving like echo chambers amplifying the genericization effect in their efforts to give an accurate reflection of contemporary spoken language. Dictionaries look at these materials not from a legal perspective but from a mainly lexical one that serves to consolidate their use. Each potential new word is analyzed by a jury of linguists, editors, and documentary specialists. The word's frequency is calculated before the decision is made to include it in the dictionary.

Third category of defendants: Retailers
The role of intermediaries, retailers, resellers, and other installers is not insignificant either, since these are often the main actors trivializing the use of a brand name. There is a long list of product and service brands found in both mass retail and industrial markets. Examples include Barco, Delco, Jacuzzi, Karcher, and Securit. In the absence of a common noun, distribution professionals—through their communications with one another (B2B) and with customers (B2C)—make things easier by using the brand name to refer to a category of products and services.

Responsible but not guilty: Companies
Saying that companies losing ownership of a patent must bear some responsibility for this outcome can only be justified if they have reacted totally passively—and for a long period of time—to the brand's generic use. Companies are particularly responsible when they focus excessively and exclusively on brand notoriety, neglecting the other elements comprising brand strength. They are also responsible when a brand name chosen opportunistically (so that it can be easily remembered and readily equated with the product, its characteristics, and benefits for consumers) has great potential for genericness.

relating to company brands or products. These directives notably include the request that the intermediaries and professionals tell Jacuzzi Brands Inc. whenever they discover any unauthorized use.

3. Genericization, as formulated by marketing specialists

In general, marketing specialists do not see why the genericization of a brand name should necessarily lead to genericide—a phenomenon that is not nearly as widely diffused as lawyers pretend. The trade press estimates that fewer than 5% of all brands are affected by the risk of genericide, which mainly impacts brands that are very well-known, highly successful, and relatively older (e.g., Escalator, Nylon, Trampoline). In marketing, brand genericization is considered first and foremost a positive. Spontaneous notoriety accompanied by a high degree of genericness is construed here as the first sign of a strong brand. This includes brands that consumers always mention when asked what known brand they associate with a particular product category. In this view, genericization more or less serves as a way of consecrating a brand's success. Many marketing specialists have tried to create situations where the whole of a new market is covered by their product brand so that both become synonymous. In this way, the brands become a cognitive reference in this new market space, presenting all the trappings of a great success. It remains that branding research (Kapferer, 2012a) has also demonstrated that brands must provide added value distinct from the product itself. The stronger a brand becomes, the greater its decoupling from the product, with the end result that it increases brand equity. Above and beyond the question of notoriety, the brand's strength also translates to customer loyalty, perceived quality, associated images, and the like. In the absence of these ingredients, even the best known brands can be fragile. One illustrative case is the Bic disposable lighter. For many European consumers, the Bic lighter is a timeless generic product that is the benchmark in its category. All other disposable lighters take the Bic as their starting point. For more than 2 decades, Bic did not advertise the product at all. It had been the first mover and constant leader in this product category. In every cigarette shop, service station, and point-of-sale, consumers would find a Bic lighter and nothing else, always asking for it by name. As time went by, however, Bic ended up paying dearly for having only relied on its lighter brand's notoriety. Once Chinese competitors succeeded in de-referencing Bic in the points-of-sale, consumers would continue to ask for and purchase Bic lighters but accept the Chinese brand instead. Kapferer (2012a) has argued that fundamentally, this means that the Bic brand's market share can be explained by its domination of distribution networks and not by the preferences of customers who, in any event, did not have any other choice than to buy a Bic. In the end, brand notoriety in the new situation was of no use to the company, since consumers ended up preferring another 'Bic' that was less expensive and more fun.

Although they are less inclined than lawyers to highlight the risks associated with a genericization process, marketing specialists have developed strategies that are supposed to guide this process in such a way as to avoid the kinds of problems caused by deficient advertising investments and brand content problems. Such strategies do not consider a high level of genericness as a final outcome and concentrate their efforts on other marketing levers. Two major strategy families can be identified at this level: ranges of products and brand contents. Note that in companies, these strategies can often be married with legal strategies.

3.1. Product range strategies

The best known strategy for avoiding excessive genericness involves diversifying the brand offer to avoid the trap of having just one single product; the risk of genericide seems to be greater when the brand is associated with a single product or limited number of products. According to Heinz marketing director Gilles Jepson (Fernandez, 2009), this explains why his company has produced so many different categories of products—from ketchup to beans or soups—all bearing the same brand name. In a similar vein, the Director for Corporate Marketing Communications at 3M once explained that with Post-its accounting for something like 400 references, the company is communicating across the whole of its range a brand, and not a particular product. This marketing strategy can be complemented by one that consists of developing and communicating a series of micro-details concerning a particular product offer, using them as points of differentiation with other products in the same category. Although many companies have a dominant presence within their product categories (exemplified by Bic lighters), they generally consider that there is no need to highlight the subtle differences between their products and the competition—a strategy that has a strong impact on consumer perceptions. Such micro-details can be tangible or intangible. They usually materialize in a design—and not just packaging—that clearly breaks from the rest of the category, much like what Apple has done with the Nano iPod's curved silhouette.

Moreover, whereas these details cannot always be perceived by non-initiates, informed consumers always detect them. Apple, for instance, has a strategy enabling a great deal of genericness—one example being what it does with its iPad in the tablets market, while keeping very clear borders between its products and rivals in the same category. The end result is that no one asks for 'a Samsung iPad' in big electronics stores.

3.2. Brand content strategies

Developing a brand strategy to get protection from the risk of genericide seems an obvious solution. One very relevant possibility within this category is the brand content approach (Fournier & Avery, 2011), which holds that a brand must be aspirational and the contents that it develops allow it to build up this characteristic so that it can become—and define—a benchmark identity, thereby raising itself above the products it sells. Today, brand content encompasses a wide range of types and modes of expression, notably audiovisual and digital media including sponsored short programs, documentaries, TV broadcasts, fiction, film, web series, blogs, service websites, social or utilitarian service and entertainment networks, events, radio, and music programs. This brand editorial activity allows it to overcome the inherent fragility of its semiotics (Moore, 2003), raising questions as to brand content's role in social media—that is, in those situations, in the era of social media, where companies act as editors. It is not enough to offer consumers content for this to be appropriated individually and above all collectively. Key in a brand content strategy is the relevance and quality of the conversation and interactions that the brand proposes and develops. Along these lines, recent studies (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011; Muniz & Schau, 2011) have demonstrated the usefulness of consumer generated content (CGC) as a way of achieving a harmonious proliferation of brand contents. Steve Jobs and Apple were very good at developing editorial contents for each of their brands, whether the iPod, iPhone, or iPad. The same can be said about leading luxury brands, for whom the classical distinction between products and brand content is meaningless (Kapferer, 2012b). The problem in the luxury sector is not genericide but counterfeiting. Indeed, nobody involved in counterfeiting wants to kill off a brand; quite the contrary. A fake Burberry overcoat is only valuable because consumers think that it is a real Burberry, with all the symbolic content that a luxury brand like this might convey. The overcoat's functional capacities mean little in comparison.

3.3. How Nestlé protects Nescafé

Nescafé, an instant coffee brand marketed by the Swiss Group Nestlé, is based on a simple neologism: the prefix 'nes-,' representing Nestlé, added to the word café. The product was launched in the 1930s but only started being successful after the Second World War, resulting from a series of innovations by the Swiss group Nestlé. Historically, Nescafé has regularly been a first mover, both in the technological domain and also because of the way it has tried, from the very outset, to create specific market codes that its rivals have largely copied. One example is Nescafé's packaging, offering the industry's first single portion packets as far back as 1960, or the first glass jar in 1962. What became common very quickly in many countries worldwide was the use of the term 'Nescafé' to refer to any instant coffee. In France, for instance, the expression "drinking a 'nes'" means drinking an instant coffee, even where this does not necessarily involve the Nescafé brand. Indeed, very few people on Earth have ever heard the word Nescafé, which appears in all dictionaries as a synonym of 'instant coffee.' Yet Nescafé has resisted the genericide to which this use seemed to condemn it, to become one of the world's strongest brands today, with Interbrand constantly ranking it about 20th globally. To achieve this, Nestlé's strategy has basically developed along three lines, enabling it to stave off both genericide and counterfeiting:

- Nescafé instant coffee did not remain a unique product for very long. A whole product range was subsequently developed. As far back as 1954, Nestlé launched the first decaffeinated Nescafé, resulting from the group's in-house technology. In 1967, the company launched Nescafé Special Filter, "a filter coffee without a filter," resulting from 10 years of deep freeze research. In the 1980s, the technology led to the creation of a range of top-quality versions like Alta Rica, Cap Colombia, and Mocamba. New research led to Nestlé's invention of the Full Aroma process in 1992, with the full aroma of freshly ground coffee being preserved from the pot to the cup. Alongside of this, it also targeted young consumers with specialty products such as Espresso, Cappuccino, Viennese, Amaretto, Irish Coffee, and Créole. By broadening its offer, Nestlé helped Nescafé escape the trap of having just one single product.

- Nestlé has been tireless in tracking what customers expect from its brands, notably Nescafé. In a steadfast bid to protect its brands, Nestlé has created an Industrial Property department.

In 2010, for Nescafé alone, this amounted to 208 trademarks; 5,031 trademark protections; 1,153 design protections; plus 164 co-opted domain names. On top of this come all the patents that Nestlé has registered through its 1,600 patent families. Nestlé uses this as a starting point for attacking any attempt to copy Nescafé or make unauthorized use of the word Nescafé. In addition to two industrial protection specialists working directly for the Nescafé brand, this action also involves 16 regional industrial production advisors worldwide, all working in close collaboration with the brand's communications managers.

- Long before the idea of brand content emerged in the field of marketing, Nestlé invested in producing editorial contents for Nescafé, starting with the famous music accompanying Nescafé's South American train journey advertisement. At some point, most everyone has whistled the Colegiala songs that Rodolfo Y Su Tipica played for the campaign's different episodes throughout the 1980s. This became cult music thanks to its clear association with the Nescafé advertisement. Since then, Nescafé has always produced contents for its brand. One example is the ephemeral Rue Muller 'open house' in Paris' 18th arrondissement, twinned with a filmed web series (simply called *Rue Muller*) that consumers can take part in. Another is the games people play on Nescafé's Facebook pages, whose purpose is to trick friends by waking them up early in the morning with trumpet and crowd noises, shouting, and so forth. In this way, Nescafé's brand has cut loose from its base product.

It is interesting to note that companies' trend in recent years toward more product range and brand content strategies seems to have lowered the risk of genericide, to the despair of the many lawyers who had hoped that this would become a new cash cow for their business. This bolsters the idea that legal and industrial property instruments are not panaceas in today's world; far from it. It also allows us to recalibrate the risk of genericide, which may not be as much of a Venus fly trap as some would have us believe.

4. The death of genericide: Long live genericization

The possibility that the aforementioned corporate strategies have reduced the risk of genericide is more of an issue for lawyers than for marketing specialists (Pickett, 2007). Meg Whitman, former head of EBay and CEO at Hewlett-Packard since September 2011, recently tweeted something that echoes this thinking (Travers, 2011): "When people use your brand name as a verb, that is remarkable." The question at this level is whether the lesser risk of genericide—and brands' increasing genericness resulting from their transformation into verbs—has become a new panacea. Case studies like the Google brand's relationship with genericide are illustrative in this respect. Google's history (how it gained a quasi-monopoly in little more than a decade) and context (the fact that it is an Internet brand) make this an extreme case, hence something that can help develop research questions.

4.1. You don't bing Google, but you google Bing!

Google, the name of the company founded in 1998, has become Europe's most popular search engine, conducting 85% of all Internet searches performed. The same applies in the United States, where it accounts for two-thirds of all searches. Google's rapid rise has been accompanied by a considerable increase in the value and recognition of its brand. Quite tellingly, Google's relationship with the risk of genericide has evolved over the years. Early on, company founders themselves were the first to use and diffuse the term 'googling' to signify the action of using the company's engine to surf the Internet, thus kick-starting the brand's genericization. In 2006, 'google' first appeared in the Merriam-Webster dictionary, where it was defined as looking online for information about someone or something. Google tried to fight against this genericization, with its lawyers arguing that Merriam-Webster change the entry, and requesting (successfully) clear indication of the term being a trademark. Letters were also written to media and press outlets, explaining that Google was to be used as a proper name upon penalty of law. The company took these actions so as to protect itself against allegations of passiveness or inertia in the face of genericization, but never actually pursued any legal action.

Considering the specificities of the Google brand helps us to understand why no lawsuits were launched against these acts of genericization. First, Google refers to the first search engine found in the Google.com domain. It is always possible to google elsewhere without this causing the domain to disappear or turning it into something generic because it has already been registered as a trademark per se. Second, the Google search engine is not purchased by individuals but used freely by them, since the only parties paying anything are sponsors. This

makes it difficult for Google to rely on jurisprudence against consumers' unauthorized use of its brand name insofar as this usually refers only to the use of a commercial trademark.

In 2009, Google's stance was affected by the arrival of a major new competitor in the search engine sector: Microsoft launched Bing, specifically to rival Google's supremacy. Toward this end, Microsoft allocated a communications budget of more than $100 million, trying to widen the generic use of the verb 'to bing' in much the same way as people spoke about tweeting, skyping, facebooking, and—above all—googling. During his launch speech, Microsoft's CEO Steve Balmer said that he hoped he would soon be able to "bing a new restaurant" when going out at night. His purpose in saying this was to ensure the search engine's brand genericness, an ambition that was soon ridiculed by fans of Google, who taunted: "You don't bing Google, but you google Bing!" They were making the point that binging had no meaning, unlike googling. To make things worse, Google's fans also uploaded a number of videos making fun of Bing's ambitions[2].

The second decade of the 21st century therefore began with two giants, Google and Microsoft, ignoring the risk of genericide and fighting to ensure that their search engines' brand names became the root for a generic verb referring to the action of surfing the Internet. Unlike the attitude adopted by Rank Xerox when it fought against the verb 'xeroxing' being used to signify photocopying, Google and Microsoft were open to their brands being adopted as generic verbs for the kinds of actions in which their customers were engaging. Were Google and Microsoft being naïve in the face of genericide, or had conditions really changed? A communications manager at Google noted that, unlike googling, no one has ever 'yahooed' or 'msned' anything, without this preventing the decline of the two services in question. In her view, the main reason for Google's new attitude relates to the speed with which reputations are made and unmade nowadays in the Internet era and to the rise in the free economy:

> Competition in this very volatile environment is extremely fierce since everything people want is just a click away. Plus, customers are not signing 24-month contracts with us, promising that they will be loyal. We need a very different approach to keep them.

In short, companies are much more interested regarding an immediate rise in their brands' notoriety—something necessary if they want to consolidate the business model in the very short term—than focused on possible future problems relating to the antonomasic use of these brand names. Specifically regarding Google, one communications manager pointed out:

> The Internet user's appropriation of a brand is an integral part of Google's vision. There is even a mirror effect at this level between the appropriation of the word Google externally through the use of the verb 'to google' and employees' internal redirection when they call themselves 'googlists' or 'googlers.'

This does not mean, however, that Google is unconcerned with problems caused by inappropriate use of its brands. Like many other companies, Google has an army of lawyers that police where and how people can use the word 'google' or variants thereof. It opposes attempts by anyone—usually websites—to give the impression that they have Google's support or are affiliated with it in one way or another. Google's brand name is connected to a very extensive product range including Google News, Google Maps, Google Earth, and Google Image. It also pursues brand content actions such as Google Creative Lab's 'Re: Brief' project. Google's position has largely been to consider that it is impossible to prevent active and competent consumers from reappropriating the brand, thereby transforming the company's name into a verb ('googling'). It considers the risks associate with this kind of genericization much lower than the benefits derived. Notably, very few people at present talk about 'binging'; Microsoft's colossal losses from this search engine have prompted many analysts to predict the company will dump it—at a time when Google is going from strength to strength. In a statement, Google said (Irvine, 2013): "While Google, like many businesses, takes routine steps to protect our trademark, we are pleased that users connect the Google name with great search results."

In May 2013, Google bristled at the way Swedes were using the word '*ogooglebar*.' The Swedish Language Council, the official body responsible for accepting new words into the language, defined *ogooglebar* as "something that cannot be found on the web using a search engine." Google's lawyers objected to this in the belief that it would dilute the company's trademark. They insisted that the definition must mention Google's name, and that *ogooglebar* should mean "something that can't be found on the web using Google" (Irvine, 2013). The incident

[2] See, for example, http://www.collegehumor.com/video/5072264/googling-with-bing

revived debates about genericide by demonstrating that a genericization-based brand strategy does not totally obviate the risk of genericide.

4.2. A deeper repertoire of issues

Far from identifying absolute certainties about the alleged 'death of genericide,' the Google case study raises a number of issues that add greater depth to this phenomenon:

- The notorious cases of genericide usually evoked by lawyers involve brands with a long history before their legal protections disappeared. The question is whether current market conditions are increasing or decreasing the risk of genericide; that is, whether the long-time horizons associated with genericide are still compatible with today's volatile markets. In turn, this raises another question regarding whether rapid genericization—notably thanks to the Internet—has become increasingly decoupled from a type of genericide that has not yet had the time to develop.

- The Google example shows how the generic use of a brand can also refer to a category of non-commercial objects. This is because consumers do not buy Google any more than they buy Facebook or Twitter, despite the fact they use these services in their daily lives. In this sense, 'googling' can be viewed as a genericization akin to 'tebowing' (referring to the habit of NFL quarterback Tim Tebow of getting on one knee to pray in public). These genericizations do not fall under trademark protection and downgrading regulations, and are therefore unlikely to lead to genericide. The question here is whether the free economy might be impermeable to genericide, and if not, which original forms of genericide organizations can assume within this growing context.

- The apparent decline in brand names' transformation into common nouns (with tweet being a notable exception) and their growing transformation, by derivation, into verbs (to tweet, to facebook, to google) needs to be analyzed to see whether this affects the conditions in which genericide develops. In terms of affecting the evolution of the English language, it is worth noting that common nouns are increasingly used to form words. This includes advertising slogans like "Millionize your lashes!" (L'Oréal's Volume Million Lashes mascara). Similarly, there is the derivation of proper nouns, and especially brand names, to form verbs. Otherwise, it is worth asking whether this linguistic tendency parallels the organized and/or spontaneous transition from a passive to an active—and even proactive—consumer, such as has recently been described and praised in marketing literature.

- It is generally considered that a brand name can be comprised of words, mixtures of words, letters, figures, and signs. Although three letter acronyms (TLA) such as CNN and NEC are currently in fashion, the recent wave of online genericizations seems to have been facilitated by the choice of a monolexical name; that is, one using a single alphabetical form. The question is then whether the use of monolexical brand names (e.g., Bing, Skype) that can be easily transformed into verbs—unlike polylexical names in TLA form (e.g., MSN, IBM) or alphanumeric combinations (e.g., 7UP, PS2)—accelerates and/or increases genericization.

5. Promoting the joy of genericization

5.1. Branding in a brand society

Above and beyond these issues and paths, brand management should also cover the resources enabling a more favorable kind of genericization, since this seems necessary to the health of a brand operating under highly competitive and dynamic conditions (e.g., Google's battle against Bing). For this, brands' role in contemporary society must be re-evaluated (Kornberger, 2010). Corporate executives are not the only ones controlling brands nowadays. There are a host of other interactions within environments comprised of consumers, employees, distributors, media, et cetera. In other words, brands do not only belong to company management but are also constantly subjected to being used, re-directed, re-appropriated, and exploited by a variety of in-house and external actors. In this sense, brands are not objects but a field of practices, notably linguistic ones that people experience on a daily basis. They transcend the border between organization and environment, attenuating any chance of control. Marketing was originally conceived of as an internal organizational activity and something subject to management control, like production, new product design, and the marketing mix. The genericide construct revolves around this notion of internal control over a brand. Nowadays, however, such controls are less and less feasible. Henceforth, brands should be viewed as platforms linking the inside and the outside of the company, providing a locus where contents can be generated and genericization produced (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In the contemporary vision of brand content

(Fournier & Avery, 2011), branding implies participatory, collaborative, and socially-linked behavior, with consumers serving as creators and disseminators of branded content as well as genericization.

Social media that generate 'surfeits' play a particularly important role within this framework. Surfeits are those material forms and immaterial social meanings that exceed a brand's authority and intelligibility. Examples include knock-offs, fakes, brand-inspired goods, overruns, defective goods, and generics. Linking counterfeits and other unauthorized brand forms with the novel and often unpredictable social meanings that emerge through moments of brand consumption, Nakassis (2013, p. 123) argues: "The brand is troubled by the surfeit of social meaning that is constantly produced by idiosyncratic and contextualized experiences of consumer engagement with brand forms (authorized or otherwise)." At the same time, brand viability depends on consumers generating social meaning through social media-based brand commitments transcending all current brand images or identities. Co-created in this way, brand content allows companies to reduce the risk of genericide by detaching a brand from its product link and encouraging genericization based on the brand name being appropriated through exchanges between different actors. This means that a brand content strategy relies on conversations and interactions between consumers, distributors, and producers (Muniz & Schau, 2011). As such, each participant in this co-creation of content legitimately feels that they are in a position to appropriate some of the value being generated in this way (Cova & Paranque, 2012). All external actors therefore find themselves in a relationship with a company, characterized by cooperation and competition: cooperating to create value, but sometimes competing over their share of it.

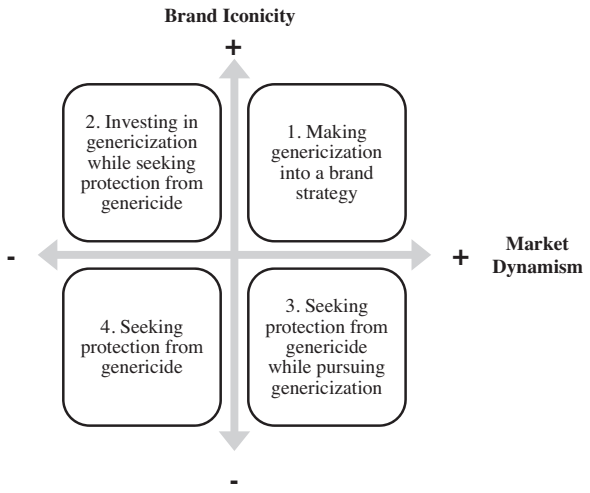
For genericization to be welcome in this context, what needs to be implemented is a double movement balancing openness and control. The former allows actors to create, modify, and use some brand elements on a daily basis as identity-related and interactional resources. This helps to build up brand content. The purpose of control is to avoid the brand's ensuing value slippage (Lepak, Smith, & Taylor, 2007) toward an actor other than the company owning the trademark. The point here is to avoid the brand name being used as a common good, akin to an open source twinned with another brand. Without going as far as to suggest the existence of a direct relationship with a trademark, some product offers are so ambiguous that normally informed and reasonably attentive consumers are unable to determine whether the product is being offered by someone other than the brand owner or, to the contrary, if the two are economically related. The development of brand content is therefore somewhat ambivalent. It may diminish the risks of genericide, but it also heightens the risk of value slipping toward other actors. iPod battles provide one example. These musical tournaments, organized without any support from Apple, involve teams using their iPods to play 60-second musical excerpts. A round ends when each team has played three song clips for the audience, which decides the winner based on crowd reaction and applause. iPod battles generate brand content for Apple, although the value created during these events does not really benefit the company, but rather the venues that use them to draw in more customers.

5.2. Monitoring legal and marketing practices

Brand managers weighing a genericization-supporting marketing action vs. a genericide-opposing legal action—or a combination of the two—need to take two main variables into account: their brand's iconicity and a market's degree of dynamism. Iconic brands are valued by customers more for what they symbolize than for what they do. Such brands have become prominent and enduring cultural symbols (Holt, 2004). A high degree of brand iconicity guarantees a strong co-creation of brand content by audiences comprised of extremely devoted customers and other stakeholders. Market dynamics refer to the environmental factors that affect a company's business model, such as technological turbulence or competitive intensity (Bao, Chen, & Zhou, 2012). Highly dynamic markets can potentially give rise to alternative states of competition radically different from today's environment.

The more iconic a brand becomes, the lower the risk of genericide. In terms of market dynamics, the more a brand operates in a fast-moving competitive environment, the greater the need for genericization. Figure 1 suggests four different strategies companies should take based on the variables of iconicity and market dynamics. In the case of an iconic brand operating in a fast-moving competitive environment (matrix Square 1), the company will—like Google—make genericization into a brand strategy. If the brand is iconic but operates in a slow-moving competitive environment (Square 2)—like Nescafé—the company can invest in genericization while seeking protection from the risk of genericide. In the case of a functional brand with a low degree of iconicity and operating in a fast-moving competitive environment (Square 3)—like Bing—the company must seek protection from genericide even as it looks for genericization. Lastly, in the case of a

Figure 1. The genericide/genericization matrix



functional brand operating in a slow-moving competitive environment—like Bic—the best way of managing the risk of genericide remains the legal approach (Square 4).

The Google case study asserts that within a highly dynamic universe where people pay for some things and get others for free, genericization plays a very important role in customer loyalty and consolidating a brand's business model. What becomes important is that the brand turn into a cognitive reference for the market without subjecting itself to certain risks like genericide or value slippage. To run this kind of brand genericization strategy, companies must implement a combination of openness and control practices. In terms of openness, brand content approaches are generated together with consumers and other brand stakeholders (e.g., employees, intermediaries) to create the thickness that is needed to decouple the brand from its associated signature product or service. In terms of control practices, market and society watch systems make it possible nowadays to detect any unauthorized or illegal use of the brand name by other commercial actors, and notably by certain stakeholders who could cause the brand's value to slip away from the company through the development of surfeits.

6. Final thoughts

The fact that a brand can become the generic name of a category of products has launched a rich debate between partisans of fighting genericide and the promoters of genericization. The former are concerned about the heartbreak of genericide and like to brandish illustrative—albeit relatively old—examples of brands losing legal protections (e.g., Escalator). The latter highlight the joy of genericization and the way in which brands are strengthened by well-structured genericization approaches (e.g., Nescafé). New conditions such as extreme market dynamism and the rise of iconic brands like Google have given advocates of genericization food for thought. Today's dynamic environment means that genericide has much less time to develop than it used to. Hence the idea that it is preferable, when orienting marketing action, to think in terms of genericization rather than genericide.

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