

## Emerging Branding Trends in the Post-COVID World

Clarisse de Aguiar Toniatti <sup>1</sup>

Manuela Guerreiro  <sup>2</sup>

Carla Viana  <sup>3</sup>

Luís Nobre Pereira  <sup>4</sup>

1. Faculty of Economics, University of Algarve, Faro, Portugal

2. Research Centre for Tourism, Sustainability and Well-being (CinTurs); Faculty of Economics, University of Algarve, Faro, Portugal

3. Instituto Politécnico de Setúbal and Instituto Politécnico de Setúbal da Lusofonia, Setúbal, Portugal

4. Research Centre for Tourism, Sustainability and Well-being (CinTurs); Escola Superior de Gestão, Hotelaria e Turismo, Universidade do Algarve, Faro, Portugal

### ABSTRACT

Innovative branding approaches are emerging since the fundamentals of brand management are being called into question. This scenario has been enhanced by COVID-19, which has brought profound impacts from which a different world will emerge. Building on this, the purpose of this study is twofold. First, to explore how the COVID-19 pandemic is influencing new trends in brand management. Second, to identify the trends that may consolidate in the post-COVID scenario. A qualitative and exploratory approach was adopted through the Delphi Method. An information-gathering process was undertaken by a panel of 45 marketing professionals from Portugal and Brazil. Informed by the Brand Work Manifesto principles, the most relevant trends to consolidate in the post-pandemic world were addressed, and findings highlight four of them: Open, new ways for the brand to generate value through an open and deeper relationship with stakeholders in the ecosystem; Agile, growing relevance of agile and flexible brand management; Digital, how the digital revolution is transforming brand management; and Authentic, the growing importance of brand purpose to generate true value.

### KEYWORDS

Brand Management, Branding, Marketing, Delphi Method.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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## 1. Introduction

Branding consists of the strategic direction for an organization's activities, providing consistency through the connection between positioning, communication, and staff working style/behavior (McEnally & De Chernatony, 1999). It is a constantly evolving concept with a high level of complexity (Veloutsou & Guzmán, 2017) that has been passing through significant changes throughout time.

In the last few decades, marketers have faced even more rapid changes in consumer behavior and market context. Boué (2013) managed to capture and translate this reality when describing this new world as the "VUCA World" - volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. Digitalization, changing values and new business models result in completely new questions and challenges for brand management (Baumgarth, Boltz & Kaibel, 2020).

All these challenges faced by marketers are highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with some analysts calling for a rethinking of traditional marketing and branding models (Kalaighnam, Tuli, Kushwaha, Lee & Gal, 2021). Throughout history, pandemics, from the black plague in the Middle Ages to the Spanish flu in the early 20th century, have brought about huge social changes, and it is certain that COVID-19 will do the same (Reeves, Carlsson-Szlezak & Swartz, 2020).

COVID-19 has brought profound impacts from which a different world will emerge (Westbrook & Angus, 2021). There are still few studies of branding trends that delve into the pandemic scenario (Baumgarth, et al., 2020). There are even fewer studies that deepen in projecting relevant branding trends that should consolidate in the post-COVID scenario. This subject represents an opportunity for marketing academics and professionals to explore how these social changes are shaping new paths of brand management and to reflect which relevant branding trends may lead the market in the post-pandemic world. Built on this, the purpose of this study is: to explore how the context of COVID-19 pandemic is influencing the strengthening of new trends in branding and to identify the trends that should consolidate and lead brand managers in the post-COVID scenario. Related specific objectives were designed: to identify the relevant branding trends in the current context; to identify which of these trends are already being put into practice; to capture trends in the Brand Work Manifesto perceived as most relevant in the post-pandemic period (deductive method); to identify any new branding trends to consolidate in the post-pandemic period (inductive method).

Exploratory research was applied, using the Delphi Method, since it is useful to better explore little-known areas (Strauss & Corbin, 2008) and to generate an opinion consensus on future facts (c). A panel of experts was designed, and professionals in the Marketing field with special tasks related to brand management were invited to participate. Informed by the literature review, a questionnaire was designed, and data collection was carried out online. Two rounds of questionnaires were needed to get a consensus. Data analyses were performed in SPSS, version 25, and Excel version 2201. Thus, from the perspective of these professional profiles, branding trends that stand out in the context of a pandemic and those that seem most promising in a new post-pandemic order were identified. Results are consolidating the framework of the Brand Work Manifesto (Baumgarth et al., 2020) and delivering new insights. Theoretical and managerial implications are discussed, and future research avenues are introduced.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Beyond Brand Work Manifesto

The Brand Work Manifesto developed by Baumgarth et al. (2020) explores new trends in Marketing and branding (table 1), which results from discussions with marketing and branding practitioners. Four main categories emerged, which suggest that brand management is likely to change in the future. Table 1 introduces and briefly describes BWM Metaprinciples.

**Table 1.** Brand Work Manifesto

Category Highlights	Statements
<b>DIMENSION: METAPRINCIPLE OPEN</b>	
Brand participation over Brand Ownership	Brands now generate their value through the appreciation of their customers and stakeholders.
Network over the Company	Relevant brands are concerned about solidifying their network. They are crucial in determining brand success stimulating co-creation, contributing to a more efficient generation of products and services.
Customer Contact over External Studies	Brand owner has to understand its target audience and its culture and to do so it's important a direct dialogue with its audience.
<b>DIMENSION: METAPRINCIPLE AGILE</b>	
Adaptation over Rigid Rules	A brand has to develop in order to stay relevant. Brand management creates the basis for the evolutionary and dynamic progression of a brand.
Experimentation over Protection	Rigid processes have to be abolished and brand management is required to act according to agile principles and banish rigid rules.
Empowerment over Top Down	Brands are allowed to make mistakes and so are employees. Letting go, trusting, permitting, and training are more important activities in brand management than directing, controlling and regulating.
<b>DIMENSION: METAPRINCIPLE DIGITAL</b>	
Data over Intuition	Brand managers of tomorrow must be able to collect, process, apply, and critically reflect the available information. This includes the ability to assess and handle more innovative approaches to data collection and manipulation.
Ranking over Recall	Brands must not only be aware of the new technologies but also develop a deeper understanding of rankings and the algorithms behind them. Attention to ethical guidelines.
<b>DIMENSION: METAPRINCIPLE AUTHENTIC</b>	
Ethics over Profit Maximization	Brands make profit and with that comes the responsibility of conducting themselves ethically and morally within the market. A brand must work for your business and bring value to the world, that is, must have brand purpose.
Authenticity over Market-oriented Positions	Following the latest trends and focusing on sales growth are not the most important factors. What is more important, is that the brand's values and communications are credible, honest and coherent.
Exclusive Touchpoints over Standard Channels	Brands need to offer personal and exclusive experiences both online and offline.

Source: Adapt from Baumgarth et al. (2020)

Starting from Brand Work Manifesto (Baumgarth et al., 2020), literature on the topic expands relevant challenges under the pandemic pressure. *Metaprinciple Open* addresses the new ways for the brand to generate value through an open and deeper relationship with its stakeholders, consumers, and everyone involved in its ecosystem. Brands have to offer meaningful participation considering that brands now, more than ever, generate their value through the appreciation of their customers and stakeholders. (Baumgarth et al., 2020). Relevant brands create shared value for its ecosystem. Some academic studies reinforce the benefits of these relationships through an enhanced reputation that leads to competitive advantages in the marketplace and superior financial outcomes (Jones, Harrison & Felps, 2018). He and Harris (2020), believe that COVID-19 pandemic will accelerate even more the relevance of Shared Value trend in the long run, as more firms realize that their long-term survival and development hinges on achieving a delicate balance between profitability and harmony with its various stakeholders. In the current context, relevant brands are concerned about solidifying their network, understanding that these networks contribute to a more efficient generation of products and services (Baumgarth et al., 2020). The pandemic is teaching us a lesson that “we are all in this together”, which will raise people’s expectation of businesses compromised in solving not only the clients’ problems but society and community-relevant issues by co-creating with customers, partners, and stakeholders (He & Harris, 2020). Finally, Baumgarth et al. (2020) argue that a brand evolves through the thinking, feeling, and action of brand decision-makers. Brand owners have to understand their target audience and their culture, and to do so is crucial a direct dialogue with their audience.

*Metaprinciple Agile*, addressing the growing importance of agile and flexible branding approaches. A brand must stay relevant, modern, and innovative, and brand management is required to act according to agile principles and banish strict rules (Baumgarth et al., 2020). Letting go, trusting, permitting, and training are more important in brand management than directing, controlling, and regulating. In this new context, firms create more flexible and resilient business models by considering how newly available resources and capabilities can offer new products and services. Many firms have turned to their employees for ideas, identification of new capabilities, and ways to pivot their operations (Fox, Davis & Baucus, 2020).

*Metaprinciple Digital* addresses how digital revolution is transforming brand management. Data sources are vastly more abundant, mainly due to the proliferation of digital channels and the touchpoints they generate. Swaminathan, Sorescu, Steenkamp & Schmitt (2020) affirm that branded experiences are significantly more complex in an environment where consumers and stakeholders can access the brand via multiple channels that seamlessly connect. Brands need to offer personal and exclusive experiences both online and offline (Baumgarth et al., 2020). "Unquestionably, there is a forced acceleration of the digital transformation agenda as we recognize how quickly customers and employees have embraced digitally-enabled journeys and experiences" (Balis, 2020, p. 5). Consumers turned to devices with internet connections to maintain their routines amid the lockdowns that marked the COVID-19 pandemic. Using new technologies, consumers have created new habits (Westbrook & Angus, 2020). In this context, combined realities (physical and digital) were relevant factors in boosting sales in 2020 in addition to enabling data collection (Westbrook & Angus, 2020). Traditional companies are adopting Phygital Reality technologies, to access the brand via multiple channels (online and offline) that seamlessly connect, improving human interactions and enhancing experiences. Along with the increased relevance of multi-channel management, we have seen an increase in the bearing of data collection and analysis expertise. Brand Managers of the future must understand how data is collected, processed, and interpreted (Baumgarth et al., 2020).

*Metaprinciple Authentic*, addressing the growing role of the brand purpose to generate true value. The role of brands has broadened as we have been observing a significant shift towards responsible and prosocial consumption in the sense that consumers consciously reflect on how to consume and make product/brand choices to be more accountable to themselves, others, the society, and the environment (He & Harris, 2020). Brands make profit, and with that comes the responsibility of conducting themselves ethically and morally within the market. A brand proposal needs to be seen far more in value propositions, not profit maximization (Baumgarth et al., 2020). Modern consumers are looking beyond messaging, diving into brands' ethics, actions, and values (Chiu & Safian-Demers, 2021). Pooj Morjaria, founder of Did they Help, an online platform launched in 2020 that scores companies according to "good or bad deeds" claims that people want more responsibility. There is a renewed sense of purpose. COVID-19 allowed companies to build better, develop emotional bonds with consumers and protect the most vulnerable (Westbrook & Angus, 2020).

The more significant the purpose of the company's business, the more value the brand will have. A well-founded purpose reflects and supports business strategy, creates differentials from the competition, finds an echo with customers, inspires employees (Aaker, 2015). Successful brand management is characterized by the fact that a brand's behavior and communication correspond to its purpose and are authentic to its customers and employees (Baumgarth et al., 2020).

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Design of Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected through a semi-structured questionnaire (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Bryman, 2012), which was informed by the literature review to address the four metaprinciples of Brand Manifesto (Baumgarth et al., 2020). It included two parts: the first one focused on identifying the most relevant branding trends within the current context, and the second one focused on pointing out branding trends that should consolidate in the post-COVID scenario. The importance of each trend was assessed with a Likert scale (ranging from 1 - not at all important- to 5 - extremely important). There is a general under-

standing that since Likert scales have properties of interval scales, they can be seen as continuous interval scales (Munn, Pearson, Jordan, Murphy, Pilkington, Medrad & Anderson, 2014). In this regard, the degree of resultant measurement error is not significant, and therefore, it is possible to develop arithmetic operations (such as averages or mean evaluation).

### 3.2 Instrument of Data Collection

Regarding the objectives of the present study, the Delphi method was adopted. It was devised by “Research and Development” Institute, with the claim to predict future changes or trends (Yeoh, 2019). This methodology is considered a useful method for eliciting and aggregating experts’ opinions whenever there is a lack of viable or practical statistical techniques (Armstrong, 2001). It can establish a study perspective through an information-gathering process, combining the knowledge and experience of specialists to generate a consensus of opinions on future facts or effects (Fernandes, 2010).

According to Rowe & Wright (2001) Delphi guarantees Anonymity of participants to avoid persuasion leading to higher response rates (Hader, 2002); Iteration in a series of rounds (Gracht, 2012); Controlled Feedback, meaning sending the results obtained previously to the panel members, to reach convergence (Monfort, 1999); Statistical “group response”, that can be presented either numerically or graphically, and usually comprises measures of central tendency (median, mean), dispersion (standard deviation and frequency distributions) (Dunn, 2004). A critical step in Delphi methodology is the selection of specialists, according to their knowledge and ability to formulate opinions (Monfort, 1999; Delbecq, Van de Ven & Gustafson, 2004).

### 3.3 Panel of Experts

For the success of any Delphi study, it is critical to secure the participation of the right panel of experts who are personally involved with the issues approached in the study (Yeoh, 2019). It is for these reasons that this study considered individuals who are strongly involved with brand management. Purposive sample was used, where sampling is conducted considering the research goals so that units of analysis are selected in terms of criteria that will allow the research questions to be answered (Bryman, 2012).

The panel of this study is composed of professionals with experience in Branding and Marketing (Table 2). Two criteria were defined for the selection of panelists: at least four years of experience in the area and performing management functions in the area. To reach relevant participants in Brazil and Portugal, researchers’ network was of paramount importance as a starting point for the snowball method. One of the advantages of this method is that participants are likely to know others who share the same characteristics that are relevant to the study (Simkus, 2022). The panel of experts was composed of Marketing Managers (40%), Marketing Directors (29%), Analyst/Specialist (16%), CEOs (11%), and Executives (4%). 62% of them are working Brazilian and 38% in Portuguese companies.

**Table 2.** Panel of Experts

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	24	53
Female	21	47
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Brazil	28	62
Portugal	17	38
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Between 30 and 39	20	44
Between 40 and 49	18	40
Between 50 and 60	4	9
Between 20 and 29	2	4
More than 60	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Manager	18	40
Director	13	29
CEO	5	11
Analyst	4	9
Specialist	3	7
Executive	2	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Food Industry	14	31
Branding and Marketing	12	27
Others	7	16
Food Retail	3	7
Communication and Events	3	7
Distribution and Logistics	2	4
Education	2	4
Tecnology	2	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Own Elaboration

### 3.4 Data Collection Procedures and Data Analysis

The data collection instrument was designed in Google Forms. A personalized e-mail was sent to each panelist with a brief text explaining the purpose and methodology of the research and with a link to the questionnaire. Anonymity among the participants was guaranteed. Each response was summarized by the facilitator, who provided individual feedback or background information for the next round.

The number of rounds of the study followed the stability criterion to stop a Delphi survey (Dajani, Sincoff & Talley, 1979; Chaffin & Talley, 1980; Scheibe, Skutsch & Schofer, 1975). According to these criteria, two rounds were performed for this research. The first round took place in June/July 2021 and the second



one in September/October 2021. Stability was determined by descriptive statistics, namely percentage (Dajani et al., 1979; Yeoh, 2019), and a combination of mean and standard deviation (Florstrand, Pitt & Kietzman, 2020), one of the most used to measure stability (Gracht, 2012). The reliability index (Cronbach's Alpha) was also used to determine the reach of stability. Outputs in this study offer a substantial reliability index (Landis & Koch, 1977): 0,741 in the first round increasing to 0,777 in the second one. To get the relevant trends, the items "4-Very Important" and "5-Extremely Important" were grouped and the location measure mean that reached over 4 points, was considered appropriate (Hsu & Lin, 2013). Finally, we analyzed the stability of results.

According to Florstrand et al. (2020), stability was determined through an analysis of a combination of mean and standard deviation. Following Chaffin & Talley (1980) and Scheibe et al. (1975) research stability was measured as the percent change of the statistics from round to round presented a 15% change or lower. In this research, stability was reached in the second round.

Responses recorded on Google Forms were exported to Excel 2201, and after codification, data were exported to SPSS 25. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentage, mean, standard deviation). The open-ended question was analyzed using thematic content analysis with an emphasis on identifying patterns within a set of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Deductive and inductive approaches (Bryman, 2012) were adopted since it used as support concepts already existing in the literature and new topics emerged.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Relevant Branding Trends in the Current Context

Table 3 presents the relevant branding trends (that kept mean values above 4) in the current context incorporated into each of the four metaprinciples according to the Brand Work Manifesto (Baumgarth et al., 2020).

Metaprinciple Authentic was considered the most relevant dimension (mean evaluation increased from 4,65 to 4,69 in round 2). All statements received high mean evaluation (above 4,50). "A solid brand is guided by its purpose which drives brand strategies, makes the brand relevant to consumers, and inspires its employees" was the most relevant trend with 4,73 mean evaluations in the second round. Metaprinciple Digital was the second most relevant dimension (mean evaluation of 4,50 for both rounds). "Brand experience complexity in an environment where consumers and stakeholders can access the brand through multiple online and offline channels" was the most relevant trend (4,57 mean in round 2, although this value decreased 0,6 points from the first round). "Brand Managers of the future must understand how data is collected, processed and interpreted, through a critical analysis and knowledge of the latest techniques of approach and collection of this data" must also be highlighted as a relevant trend (mean evaluation from 4,45 to 4,55 in round 2). Metaprinciple Agile was also the second most relevant dimension (mean evaluation from 4,43 to 4,50). "Branding creates the basis for the evolutionary and dynamic progression of a brand, so it must constantly deal with internal and external changes" was the most relevant trend (mean 4,53). Metaprinciple Open was in third place with mean evaluation of 4,42 for both rounds. "A brand gains relevance to generate true value for its ecosystem" was ranked as the most relevant statement (mean evaluation of 4,64 in round 2). The Mann-Whitney test was used to determine if branding trends of each Metaprinciple were rated differently considering two groups: Brazilians and Portuguese. The following hypotheses were tested:

**H<sub>0</sub>** – Branding trends **are not rated significantly differently** between Brazilians and Portuguese.

**H<sub>1</sub>** - Branding trends **are rated significantly differently** between Brazilians and Portuguese.

Results of the Mann-Whitney Test show that Brazilians and Portuguese evaluate the majority of statements' relevance in the same way ( $p$ -value > 0,05).

**Table 3.** Branding Trends

Statements	Mean			Standard Deviation			Mann-Whitney (p value)	
	R1	R2	Variation	R1	R2	Variation	R1	R2
<b>METAPRINCIPLE AUTHENTIC – Mean R1: 4,65 Mean R2: 4,69</b>								
A solid brand is guided by its purpose which drives brand strategies, makes the brand relevant to consumers and inspires its employees.	4,71	4,73	0,6%	0,610	0,539	-11,5%	0,011	0,004
The role of a brand has been expanding and today it is understood that it goes far beyond maximizing profits. A brand must have purpose.	4,65	4,67	0,4%	0,594	0,564	-5,1%	0,053	0,008
The more relevant and noticeable its purpose, the more value the brand will have.	4,61	4,66	1,0%	0,695	0,635	-9%	0,002	0,002
<b>METAPRINCIPLE DIGITAL – Mean R1: 4,50 Mean R2: 4,50</b>								
Brand experiences are increasingly complex in an environment where consumers and stakeholders can access the brand through multiple online and offline channels that easily connect.	4,63	4,57	-1,2%	0,564	0,625	10,8%	0,006	0,003
Brand Managers of the future must understand how the data is collected, processed and interpreted, through a critical analysis and knowledge of the latest techniques of approach and collection of this data.	4,45	4,55	2,2%	0,786	0,675	-13,7%	0,108	0,769
Brands must not only be aware of the new technologies but also develop a deeper understanding of rankings and the algorithms behind them.	4,43	4,37	-1,4%	0,640	0,679	6,1%	0,137	0,051
<b>METAPRINCIPLE AGILE – Mean R1: 4,43 Mean R2: 4,50</b>								
Branding creates the basis for the evolutionary and dynamic progression of a brand, so it must constantly deal with changes in the internal and external environment.	4,49	4,53	0,9%	0,644	0,625	-2,9%	0,226	0,242
Flexibility, agility, and the willingness to experiment (combined with the willingness to make mistakes) are the components of the new Branding mindset.	4,37	4,47	2,2%	0,824	0,698	15,0%	0,221	0,110
<b>METAPRINCIPLE OPEN – Mean R1: 4,42 Mean R2: 4,42</b>								
A brand gains relevance by working to generate value for its ecosystem.	4,47	4,64	3,9%	0,644	0,549	-14,7%	0,472	0,567
To understand its consumer in-depth, the brand must establish direct forms of dialogue with its target and not rely only on research carried out by third parties.	4,49	4,40	- 2,0%	0,612	0,705	15,0%	0,650	0,488
Relevant brands generate value through the evaluation of their consumers and stakeholders, who determine what the brand represents.	4,35	4,33	-0,5%	0,744	0,798	7,3%	0,948	0,958
Co-creation increasingly contributes to a faster and more efficient generation of product or service launches and improvements.	4,37	4,29	-1,9%	0,692	0,695	0,5%	0,342	0,060

Source: Own Elaboration

To better understand how companies are internalizing these movements considered relevant in the current context, participants were asked to point out trends as practice in their companies (see table 4).

Regarding Metaprinciple Authentic, 77% (round 2) of the panelists claimed that their companies are guided by their purpose, always maintaining coherence in way of relating to employees, consumers, and environment. 77% (round 2) of the panelists stated that their companies have a clear purpose, which engages employees and inspires consumers. In Metaprinciple Digital 80% (round 2) of the experts affirmed that their companies offer several channels (online and offline) through which consumers and partners can contact them. Lastly, it was stated that they are monitoring and investing in innovative ways of data collection, which has resulted in improvements in data processing and analysis (53% in round 2). In Metaprinciple Agile, 80% (round 2) of the panelists claimed that marketing in their companies is aware of the constant internal and external changes that occur, adjusting the company's strategic guidelines when necessary. 57% (round 2) of them believe that their companies encourage employee participation and proactivity and claimed they feel stimulated to think and act creatively, not being afraid of making mistakes. In Metaprinciple Open, panelists stated that their companies are already developing projects that generate value for their ecosystem (86% in round 2). Also, their companies are focusing on direct contact with customers, as they are already developing channels of direct contact with their clients and regularly collect and analyze inputs regarding brand and marketing insights (71% in round 2).



**Table 4.** Trends as Practice

METAPRINCIPLE AUTHENTIC	%	
	R1	R2
My company is guided by its purpose, always maintaining its coherence in the way of relating to its employees, consumers and the environment.	68	77
My company has a clear purpose, which engages employees and inspires consumers.	74	77
METAPRINCIPLE DIGITAL	%	
	R1	R2
We offer several channels (online and offline) through which our consumers and partners can contact our company.	82	80
We are monitoring and investing in innovative ways of data collection, which has resulted in improvements in data processing and analysis.	45	53
METAPRINCIPLE AGILE	%	
	R1	R2
Our Marketing is aware of the constant changes that occur internally and externally and is always attentive, adjusting the company's strategic guidelines when necessary.	82	80
My company encourages employee participation and proactivity. We feel stimulated to think and act creatively, we are not afraid of making mistakes.	60	57
METAPRINCIPLE OPEN	%	
	R1	R2
My company has already developed projects that generate true value for its ecosystem (the community where it is inserted, suppliers, customers, among others).	76	86
My company has already developed channels of direct contact with the consumer and uses these channels regularly to collect and analyze inputs regarding our products / services and launches.	60	71

Source: Own Elaboration

## 4.2 Prominent Trends for the Post-COVID Scenario

For this part of the study, an open-ended question was presented to stimulate experts brainstorming in the first round, allowing the expert panelists to offer additional items not considered in the extant literature (Yeoh, 2019). Data collected from this question were analyzed through Thematic Content Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Framework of Brand Manifesto (Baumgarth et al., 2020) was applied to structure data analysis into four main dimensions: Metaprinciple Open, Metaprinciple Agile, Metaprinciple Digital, and Metaprinciple Authentic.

Data analysis adopted deductive and inductive procedures. First, all statements were exported to Excel 2201, and keywords and sentences were identified to code the data. In the second phase, codes were grouped following the categories and dimensions of Brand Work Manifesto framework (Baumgarth et al., 2020). Grouping was analyzed and validated by two marketing and branding experts. Finally, deductive method was adopted to capture trends in the Brand Work Manifesto perceived as most relevant in the post-pandemic period and inductive method was used to identify any new branding trends to consolidate in the post-pandemic period that hadn't been covered in the framework. The result of this analysis was a final list of eleven macro trends that was submitted in the second round of the panel for experts to choose a maximum of five that they considered the most likely to consolidate in post-COVID scenario (table 5).

*Metaprinciple Open:* "Brand Participation over Brand Ownership" was added by panelists since it is important for brand managers to be aware of the meaningful and genuine brand participation in the ecosystem to experience positive performance-related outcomes (Freeman, Bryson & Green, 2018). *Metaprinciple Agile:* Flexibility and agility are components of the new branding mindset that will become even more relevant in the future. Brand management creates the basis for the evolutionary and dynamic progression of a brand. Thus, rigid processes must be abolished, and brand management is required to act according to agile principles (Baumgarth et al., 2020). *Metaprinciple Digital:* COVID-19 was marked by several lockdowns that lead consumers to turn even more to devices with internet connections to maintain their routines. Using new technologies, consumers have created new habits (Westbrook & Angus, 2020).

Therefore, this dimension was strongly recognized by panelists. Remote work brings a trend of hybrid work consolidation, and this is causing a big impact on work routines and consumer behavior. Brand experiences will become more complex in an environment where consumers and stakeholders can access the brand through multiple online and offline channels that easily connect (Swaminathan et al., 2020). Online shopping is a habit that will become increasingly present in consumers' lives from now on. Due to this current context becoming more and more digital, brands must turn even more to branding in the digital environment: delve into the digital behavior of consumers (Troisi, Maione, Grimaldi & Loia, 2020), management of relevant content and strategies within the various digital channels. *Metaprinciple Authentic*: This dimension was considered the most relevant and prominent to consolidate in the post-COVID reality. Not only all its categories were mentioned but also new ones were brought up by the panelists. In this context, the expectation that companies must protect the planet and contribute to a better society will become even more relevant. A brand must have purpose, that is, it must have a reason to exist to improve the world. To be relevant it must be guided by its purpose: engaging employees, customers, and partners. And maintain consistency in its actions, in addition to positioning itself. Companies must act and show exactly what they do and how they do it: consumers are demanding transparency above all. Brand transparency is all about being open and honest when it comes to your products, your pricing, your values, and how you do business overall (Donlan, 2021). Lasting relationships with today's customers are contingent on your brand's ability to deliver relevant, contextual, personalized experiences (Donlan, 2021). Therefore, brands must consider providing special memories and experiences above products/services. People have now a new understanding of themselves and their place in the world in the quest for a fuller, more balanced, and better life (Westbrook & Angus, 2021). Health (physical and mental) will become even more of a top priority to consumers and to companies.

**Table 5.** Framework Emerging from Thematic Content Analysis

Category Highlights	Statements
<b>DIMENSION: METAPRINCIPLE OPEN</b>	
1- Brand Participation over Brand Ownership	Relevant brands work to create shared value for their ecosystem through meaningful participation. Companies are affected by and affect many individuals and groups. The more they considerate stakeholders' needs and demands more they'll experience positive performance-related outcomes.
<b>DIMENSION: METAPRINCIPLE AGILE</b>	
2- Experimentation over Protection	Flexibility, agility, are the components of the new Branding mindset.
<b>DIMENSION: METAPRINCIPLE DIGITAL</b>	
3- Phygital over Standart Channels (New)	Brand experiences are increasingly complex in an environment where consumers and stakeholders can access the brand through multiple online and offline channels that easily connect.
4- Remote Working over Traditional Working (New)	Remote work brings a trend of hybrid work consolidation and this is causing a big impact on work routines and consumer behavior.
5- E-commerce Era (New)	Online shopping is a habit that will become increasingly present in consumers' lives. E-commerce will gain even more relevance within this context.
6- Digital Environment over Traditional Behavior (New)	Brands must turn even more to branding in the digital environment: delve into the digital behavior of consumers, management of relevant content, and strategies within the various digital channels.
<b>DIMENSION: METAPRINCIPLE AUTHENTIC</b>	
7- Ethics over Profit Maximization	The expectation that companies must protect the planet and contribute to a better society has increased. Businesses must collaborate to create a more sustainable world, promoting the shift from a volume-based economy to a value-based economy, contributing to a more sustainable world.
8- Authenticity over Market-oriented Positions	A brand must have purpose, that is, it must have a reason to exist to improve the world. To be relevant it must be guided by its purpose: engaging employees, customers and partners. And maintain consistency in its actions, in addition to positioning itself.
9- Transparency above all (New)	Consumers will no longer forgive lack of transparency. Companies must act and show exactly what they do and how they do it.
10- Memorable Experiences above Transactions (New)	Brands must consider provide special memories and experiences above products/services.
11- Health Protagonist (New)	Health (physical and mental) will become even more a top priority to consumers and to companies.

Source: Own Elaboration

At the end of the second round, using the same study methodology applied by Yeoh (2019) and Dajani et al. (1979), the study considered only trends with a frequency from 51% (table 6). The main branding trends considered to consolidate in the post-COVID scenario by marketing experts belong to Metaprinciple Authentic. 71% of the panelists selected the statement which defends that “brands must have a relevant purpose and must be guided by it, engaging employees, customers, and partners. And maintain consistency in its actions, in addition to positioning itself.” 68% of the experts believe that the expectation that companies must protect the planet and contribute to a better society will continue to increase.

Metaprinciple Open performed the third brand management trend that panelists believe to consolidate in the next few years. 54% pointed out that “Relevant brands work to create shared value for its ecosystem through meaningful participation. Metaprinciple Digital performed the last two branding trends believed to consolidate in the post-COVID market. 51% of the panelists believe that professionals must turn even more to branding in the digital environment: delve into the digital behavior of consumers, management of relevant content and strategies within the various digital channels. Also, 51% of the experts are aware of the complexity and relevance increase of brand experiences in an environment where consumers and stakeholders can access the brand through multiple online and offline channels that easily connect.

**Table 6.** Ranking of the Prominent Trends

Trend (Statement)	%
A brand must have purpose, that is, it must have a reason to exist to improve the world. To be relevant it must be guided by its purpose: engaging employees, customers, and partners. And maintain consistency in its actions and positioning itself.	71
The expectation that companies must protect the planet and contribute to a better society has increased. Businesses must collaborate to create a more sustainable world, promoting the shift from a volume-based economy to a value-based economy, contributing to a more sustainable world.	68
Relevant brands work to create shared value for their ecosystem through meaningful participation. Companies are affected by and affect many individuals and groups. The more they considerate stakeholders' needs and demands more they'll experience positive performance-related outcomes.	54
Brands must turn even more to branding in the digital environment: delve into the digital behavior of consumers, management of relevant content, and strategies within the various digital channels.	51
Brand experiences are increasingly complex in an environment where consumers and stakeholders can access the brand through multiple online and offline channels that easily connect.	51

Source: Own Elaboration

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Relevant Branding Trends in the Current Context

All the trends identified in the literature review and presented to the panelists were considered relevant, performing a mean of the Likert scale above 4. In this way, it was able to identify a strong harmony of thought between academics cited in this study and marketing/branding professionals.

Metaprinciple Authentic, considered the most important. The role of a brand has been expanding and today it is understood that it goes far beyond maximizing profits. Brands must have purpose, that is, they must have a reason to exist to improve the world. Panelists strongly believe that a well-founded purpose reflects and supports the business strategy, creates differentials about the competition, finds an echo within customers, energizes and inspires employees (Aaker, 2015). More than 75% of the experts outlined that their company has a clear purpose, which engages employees and inspires consumers, maintaining its coherence in the way of relating to its stakeholders. This corroborates with some author studies (Baumgarth et al., 2020; He & Harris, 2020; Yohn, 2020), which argue that successful brand management is characterized by the fact that a brand's behavior and communication correspond to its purpose.

Metaprinciple Digital - Brand Managers of the future must understand how data is collected, processed, and interpreted (Baumgarth et al., 2020). More than 50% of the panelists stated that “We are monitoring and investing in innovative ways of data collection, which has resulted in improvements in data processing and analysis”. Professionals are strongly alert to brand experiences that are becoming even more complex in an environment where consumers and stakeholders can access the brand through multiple

online and offline channels that easily connect, as exposed by Swaminathan et al. (2020) and highlighted by Westbrook and Angus (2021, p. 17) with the term Phygital Reality. 80% of the panelists admit that their companies already offer several channels (online and offline) through which their consumers and partners can make contact.

Metaprinciple Agile - "Branding creates the basis for the evolutionary and dynamic progression of a brand, so it must constantly deal with changes in the internal and external environment". This finding is endorsed by Baumgarth et al. (2020). 80% of the panelists declared that "Our Marketing is aware of the constant changes that occur internally and externally and is always attentive, adjusting the company's strategic guidelines when necessary". Therefore, the study concludes that agility and flexibility, already part of past studies (Kotler et al., 2017; Baumgarth et al., 2020; Fox et al., 2020) are already consolidated in the marketplace.

Metaprinciple Open - The most relevant trend evaluated in this dimension: "A brand gains relevance by working to generate value for its ecosystem" is linked to the shared-value proposition presented by Westbrook and Angus (2021), which defends the shift from a volume-based economy to a value-based economy. Companies are affected by and affect many individuals and groups, including suppliers, customers, employees, communities, and the natural environment. The more they considerate stakeholders' needs and demands more they will experience positive performance-related outcomes (Freeman et al., 2018). This issue is becoming so relevant that more than 85% of the panelists claimed that their companies have already developed (or are developing) projects that generate true value for their ecosystem.

## 5.2 Prominent Trends for the Post-COVID Scenario

Previous research pointed out that Metaprinciple Authentic, which highlights the importance of brand purpose, was considered the most relevant dimension of the Brand Work Manifesto. The statement that mentions that relevant brands are working to generate true value for their ecosystem was rated one of the most important trends in the current context. The study reinforces this scenario when it points out the two most likely trends to consolidate in the post-COVID context: Brand Purpose (71%) and Brand Value (69%). Experts rated Metaprinciple Digital as the second most relevant dimension of the Brand Work Manifesto and pointed out Digital Environment (51%) and Multichannel Brand Experience (51%) trends as likely to consolidate in the post-COVID scenario. Digital Environment was a new trend identified through inductive method and pointed out by panelists as a relevant trend that should consolidate in the post-COVID scenario.

Trends linked to brand purpose, digital environment, and meaningful brand participation have accelerated within the new pandemic scenario and have become even more relevant. These were highlighted by specialist professionals as the trends that will consolidate in the new post-COVID reality.

## 6. Conclusions and Implications

### 6.1 Main Findings of the Study

Based on Brand Work Manifesto (Baumgarth et al., 2020) this investigation aims (1) to explore how the context of COVID-19 pandemic is influencing the emergence or strengthening of new trends in brand management and (2) to identify the trends that should consolidate and lead brand managers in the post-COVID scenario.

All the trends identified in the literature review and presented to the panelists were considered relevant being the Metaprinciple Authentic the most important dimension as rated by the panelists. COVID-19 increased the expectation that companies must protect the planet and contribute to a better society. Brands make profit and with that comes the responsibility of conducting themselves ethically and morally within the market (Westbrook & Angus, 2021). Metaprinciple Digital, the second most relevant dimension, states that along with the increased relevance of multi-channel management pushed by the pandemic context data collection and analysis expertise are critical. Therefore, Brand Managers of the future must understand how data is collected, processed, and interpreted (Baumgarth et al., 2020). Metaprinciple

Agile draws the panelists' attention since it approaches the flexibility and agility for a brand to keep itself relevant (Baumgarth et al., 2020). In the current scenario agility and flexibility are even more important as it has been witnessing firms creating more flexible and resilient business models demanded in the pandemic reality. The fourth relevant dimension, Metaprinciple Open, highlights that brand must work to generate value for its ecosystem through meaningful participation.

The study points out that all Metaprinciples have trends that are already been implemented by companies of panelists in some way. They recognize that their companies have a clear and engaging purpose (Metaprinciple Authentic). Also recognize that the Marketing management in their companies is agile, adjusting the company's strategic guidelines when necessary (Metaprinciple Agile). Panelists assumed that their companies already work with several channels – online and offline – through which consumers and stakeholders can make contact. And they are monitoring and investing in innovative ways of data collection (Metaprinciple Digital). Finally, panelists stated that their companies are already developing projects that generate value for their ecosystem (Metaprinciple Open).

The research presents branding trends of the Brand Work Manifesto linked to the brand purpose (having an authentic and engaging purpose and maintaining consistency with it; work collaborating to a more sustainable world); shared value (create shared value for its ecosystem through meaningful participation); and multichannel experiences (increasingly more complex and relevant) as the prominent ones to consolidate in the post-pandemic scenario.

A trend that approaches the importance of delving into the digital environment (deepening in digital behavior of consumers, management of relevant content and strategies) was captured as a new branding trend to consolidate even more in the new future.

## 6.2 Theoretical Implications

All these new challenges faced by marketers and highlighted by the pandemic are drawing attention of some analysts that are calling for a fundamental rethinking of marketing and branding models (De Paz, Muller, Munoz Boudet & Gaddis, 2020). Besides addressing the Brand Work Manifesto's relevant trends under the pandemic pressure, this study makes a relevant contribution to the literature in presenting the branding guidelines that should lead brand management from now answering to Baumgarth et al. (2020) as "hot topics" in the post-COVID world to be deepened by academics.

The current study contributed, not only to confirm trends considered most relevant in the literature, but also in the identification of emerging trends, essentially marked by the pandemic context in which we live. In this way, it was possible to add a contribution to the Brand Manifesto (Baumgarth et al., 2020).

## 6.3 Managerial Implications

This study adds to marketing professionals by contributing to understanding how COVID-19 environment is shaping new paths of brand management and by calling their attention to the relevant branding trends that should consolidate and lead the market in the post-pandemic world. This material is of great value in guiding brand managers to think about their business structures, and an ideal profile for the branding team, among other strategic aspects that must address the new branding guidelines.

## 6.4 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This investigation was designed exclusively considering practitioners (marketing and branding professionals). Future research should include academics since their expertise include the patterns and theoretical models that can lead to the consolidation of trends (Murphy et al., 2007). Insights from both will ensure broader and richer branding trend projections.

The study presents a framework containing four dimensions that encompass several trends considered relevant for the current moment and the coming years. There is an opportunity to delve deeper into the subject, choosing a metaprinciple or one trend of the framework. Finally, future research should empirically test the branding relevant trends in the post-COVID context across different nationalities and sectors of activity, such as tourism and destination branding. Quantitative studies can contribute to more robust and generalized results.



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## ORCID

Clarisse de Aguiar Toniatti

Manuela Guerreiro  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6398-9712>

Carla Viana  <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-6618-8184>

Luís Nobre Pereira  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0917-7163>

## Notes on contributors

**Clarisse Toniatti** holds a Master's Degree in Marketing Management from the University of Algarve (Faculty of Economics). For the last ten years, she has taken positions of leadership in the branding areas of large national and multinational industries. Currently, she holds the position of Planning and Corporate Brand Manager for one of the largest dairy industries in Brazil. Her research interests include branding trends, brand management, and strategic marketing.

**Manuela Guerreiro** is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Economics, University of Algarve (Portugal). She is Co-coordinator of CinTurs, where she is also an integrated researcher. She is the Programme Leader of the Master of Marketing Management and a member of the Board of the PhD in Tourism at this institution. Her PhD is in Economic and Management Sciences, and she holds an MSc in Cultural Management at the University of the Algarve. Her current research interests include Marketing and Design, Consumer Behaviour, Consumer Experiences, Brand Management, Social Media Marketing, Arts and Events Marketing, Destination Branding and Image.

**Carla Viana** is a Professor of Marketing at the School of Business Sciences at the Polytechnic Institute of Setúbal and the Polytechnic Institute of Lusofonia. She has also been working as a Consultant and Certified Trainer since 2006.

Since 2007, in her professional and business activity, she has held management positions in prestigious sectors and companies recognized in management, marketing, and branding. She is also the Vice-President of the Digital Marketing Association and the Executive Director of the People Talent brand.

**Luís Nobre Pereira** is a professor of Market Research and Data Analysis at the School of Management, Hospitality and Tourism of the University of Algarve. He has been serving as President of the Technical-Scientific Council of the School of Management, Hospitality and Tourism since 2019. He is also Vice-president of the Research Centre for Tourism, Sustainability and Well-being. He is active in conducting funded research projects in the field of Tourism, Hospitality Management and Market Research. His research interests include marketing research, tourism management, and hospitality management. He is the author of more than 50 scientific papers published in academic journals with scientific refereeing.