Things Fall Apart: The Dynamics of Brand Audience Dissipation

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Much prior work illuminates how fans of a brand can contribute to the value enjoyed by other members of its audience, but little is known about any processes by which fans contribute to the dissipation of that audience. Using longitudinal data on *America's Next Top Model*, a serial brand, and conceptualizing brands as assemblages of heterogeneous components, this article examines how fans can contribute to the destabilization of a brand's identity and fuel the dissipation of audiences of which they have been members. This work suggests that explanations focusing on satiation, psychology, or semiotics are inadequate to account for dissipation in the audience for serial brands. Moreover, the perspective advanced here highlights how fans can create doppelgänger brand images and contribute to the co-destruction of serial brands they have avidly followed.

> Three stars of *America's Next Top Model* have been dropped from the long-running TV show after falling ratings. Photographer Nigel Barker, runway coach J. Alexander, and photo-shoot director Jay Manuel will not return, said the show's host Tyra Banks. The show follows a group of girls as they are put through a series of modeling tests in order to become the ultimate series winner. Barker said he had been expecting to be dropped for some time. "It wasn't a shock. I'm friends with Tyra and the producers," the photographer, who joined the show in 2004, told E! News. "There had been a discussion that ratings were down and that something like this would happen." *America's Next Top Model*, which airs on The CW channel in the US, has lost more than half of its 2005 audience, and is currently watched by less than two million people. (BBC News Arts and Entertainment 2012)

The phenomenon of a once-powerful brand losing popularity is far from rare. It is particularly visible among "serial brands" such as *America's Next Top Model* (ANTM), which is referred to in the quotation above. We use the term *serial brands* to refer to those with two interrelated properties. First, they are episodic, in that they are issued iteratively, with a separation between one release and the next. Second, they are highly epistemic consumption objects (Zwick and Dholakia 2006), because their intrinsically episodic nature both invites consumers to pay renewed attention when a next installment of the brand is released and leads consumers to expect that there will be something new to pay attention to. Serial brands range from movie franchises to book sequels, video game series, sports teams, and fashion collections. In this article, our interest focuses on a process that leads large portions of an audience to start to turn their attention away from a serial brand they once followed. In particular, we are interested in the role of avid audience members themselves in such a process.

Research has frequently examined fan engagement with brands (Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry 2003; Kozinets 1997, 2001; Schau and Muniz 2004). A particularly relevant addition to this literature is Russell and Schau's (2014) study of how highly engaged audience members cope when serial

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brands they are avidly following cease production. Yet, while we know a considerable amount about how fans engage with and add value to one another's brand consumption, we know little about any processes that result in the majority of them turning their attention away from a brand even while producers are attempting to sustain its life span. We refer to the process of audience loss as "brand audience dissipation."

Most extant research that sheds light on why consumers grow disenchanted with a once-favored brand (Commuri 2009; Grégoire and Fisher 2006, 2008; Johnson, Thomson, and Matear 2011) is of limited value for understanding the loss of attention by the majority of an audience base because it explains individual-level, not aggregate-level, defection from brands. Somewhat more relevant to our audience-level focus are certain studies of "satiation" with brands. The satiation perspective holds that consumers can become satiated on specific attributes of goods when consumption exceeds a certain level, after which they seek variety (McAllister 1982). Such accounts have been used to explain why fans of serial brands, such as movie franchises, prefer sequels that have individual names to those that are numbered (Sood and Drèze 2006): it is posited that sequels with names promise more variation from the original movie than those that are merely numbered. These accounts, however, cannot explain why audiences continue to pay attention to and engage with some brands that introduce variety while losing interest in others that do so. Nor do they shed light on why satiation —if satiation is indeed what accounts for attention loss among consumers of serial brands—sets in among a wide swath of fans at some tipping point (Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel 2006, 60) in the brand's life course. Moreover, these accounts render fans as passive recipients of brand offerings, ignoring the possibility that engaged consumers may contribute to their demise.

Thus, available theoretical perspectives seem unlikely to allow us to address our central research questions, which are these: What are the dynamics of audience dissipation, and how do consumers contribute to these dynamics? To address these questions, we adopt the perspective that brands such as the one we study can be regarded as "assemblages" comprising heterogeneous and evolving sets of components with varying capacities. Various scholars, such as DeLanda (2006) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987), have developed assemblage theories. Consumer researchers have adapted these theories to explain the stabilization and potential destabilization of individual consumers' experiences (Canniford and Shankar 2013), of families' practices (Epp, Schau, and Price 2014; Epp and Velagelati 2014), and of consumption communities (Thomas, Price, and Schau 2013). Sociologists have recently argued that brands, too, can be regarded as assemblages (Enwistle and Slater 2012, 2013; Lury 2009). An assemblage theoretic perspective is particularly suitable for studying brand audience dissipation for several reasons.

First, assemblages are conceptualized as agentic systems of diverse components that interact with one another in ways that can either stabilize or destabilize an assemblage's identity (DeLanda 2006, 12). In a social assemblage such as a brand, these components can include both people and things, such as the consumers of the brand, the physical elements of the product itself, and the technologies of distribution that allow the consumer to access the brand. Conceptualizing brands as systems that include not only components that marketers directly or indirectly control but also the audiences they are able to enroll (however temporarily) facilitates consideration of how consumers, as parts of an assemblage interacting with other assemblage components, may contribute to its destabilization or stabilization.

A second helpful element of assemblage theories is that they draw attention to the material and expressive "capacities" of components: capacities are defined as what components have the potential to do when they interact with other entities (DeLanda 2006). For example, water has the capacity to boil, but this capacity will only manifest itself when the heat is applied (Bryant 2009). Material capacities are those that can interact with the capacities of both nonsentient and sentient elements (e.g., people) within the assemblage, either via mechanical causation (where a given cause always leads to a given effect) or via catalytic causation (where a given cause may only make a given effect more likely by triggering attention, thought, and behavior on the part of individuals; DeLanda 2006, 11). Thus, the material capacity of heat can interact with water to directly cause boiling or it can catalytically interact with people's senses and lead them to exercise caution in the vicinity of the heat. Expressive capacities can interact only with capacities of sentient beings and thus typically "involve catalysis" (DeLanda 2006, 11). For example, when an advertising campaign that has ample expressive capacity is launched within a brand assemblage, it may make it more likely, but it does not mechanically cause, the improvement of consumers' attitudes and increase in their purchases. Considering the material and expressive capacities of brand assemblage components in conjunction helps draw attention to how components exercising a material capacity (e.g., platforms supporting fan communication) may interact with those exercising an expressive capacity (e.g., fans conveying their interpretations of events on an episode of a show) and thus contribute to processes that stabilize or destabilize (also known as territorializing and deterritorializing) the identity of the assemblage.

A third notable premise of assemblage perspectives is that the components of assemblages are not fixed (DeLanda 2006; Epp and Price 2010). Rather, new components can be integrated into an assemblage, others can detach from it, and yet the assemblage can maintain its identity. For example, the players on a hockey team often change from season to season, but the rivalries between the teams remain (Reid 2010). This idea corresponds well to what we know about how powerful brands evolve over time through the introduction of new "stories" (Brown 2005; Holt 2004; Sherry 2005). It also facilitates examining a process that might lead audiences to become disentangled from the brand assemblage, that is, a process

that leads to audience dissipation. Indeed, a focus on the loss of components from an assemblage and on its destabilization is consistent with an assemblage theoretic perspective: a major premise of such perspectives is that assemblages are constantly at risk of breakdown (Law 2009, 2). As Canniford and Shankar (2013, 1059) note in studying how consumers form assemblages to experience nature, "resources often fail to work together." They adopt Callon's (1986) term *betrayal* to refer to the destabilization that occurs in an assemblage when components cease to cohere and the identity of the assemblage is destabilized. This notion of the potential for "betrayals" or breakdowns seems particularly relevant given our focus on the process that gives rise to audience dissipation.

We use this assemblage perspective to answer our research questions regarding the dynamics of audience dissipation and how consumers contribute to these dynamics. We draw on data collected in the context of the brand ANTM. Through our analysis, we identify three ongoing elements of a process through which fans within a brand assemblage contribute to audience dissipation. These include fans *reframing*, or exercising their material capacities of focusing attention on new components entering the assemblage and framing them as contradictions; *remixing*, or creating material artifacts that increase the heterogeneity and diminish the coherence of the assemblage; and *rejecting*, or exercising their expressive capacities by interpreting the new components that replace old ones as having inadequate capacities to support the brand identity. We also highlight how capacities of components of intersecting assemblages, in particular discussion boards and media, can help to catalyze the impact of fans' behaviors by disseminating them among the wider audience.

Our research is important because it complements individual-level work that illuminates why consumers actively turn against brands they once loved (Grégoire and Fisher 2006, 2008; Johnson et al. 2011), illuminating why a fan base may lose interest in brands that once held their attention. We also complement existing work at the audience level that analyzes the value-creating practices common within brand communities (Schau, Muniz, and Arnould 2009) by highlighting how brand value may be diminished by those most engaged with the brand or its community. Our research is also important because our field's understanding of how brands decline—which accompanies audience dissipation—is limited relative to its understanding of how they emerge and thrive. While examples of accounts of successful brands abound (Brown et al. 2003; Brown, McDonagh, and Schulz 2013; Diamond et al. 2009; Giesler 2012; Holt 2004; Thompson and Tian 2008), few address the decline of once powerful brands.

To establish a foundation for our work, we review prior literature relevant to understanding consumer (dis)engagement with brands. We then outline our methodology and describe our findings. We conclude by discussing the implications of these findings and directions for future research.

UNDERSTANDING BRAND (DIS)ENGAGEMENT

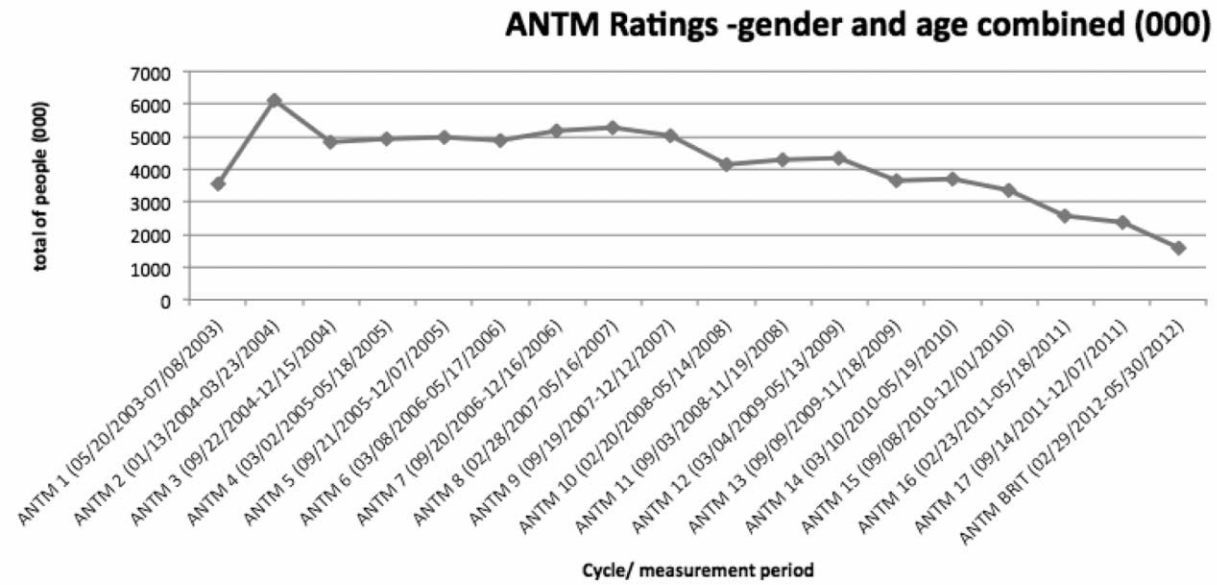
Individual consumers' relationships with brands have been the subject of much research, especially since Fournier's (1998) seminal article on the topic. Given our audience-level focus, however, we cannot anchor our work conceptually in the brand relationship literature because it is not clear that all audience members feel a relationship with a brand to which they pay attention. For example, Thomson (2006) distinguishes between celebrities to whom consumers pay attention but feel little attachment and those to whom they pay attention and feel strongly attached. Thus, we regard individual-level brand relationships and audience brand engagement as distinct concepts. That said, we highlight some selected brand relationship studies that help shape our understanding of disengagement from, or loss of attention to, a brand.

Of particular interest is research on relationship trajectories that entail decline (Fournier 1998). For example, Grégoire and Fisher (2008) find a "love becomes hate" effect when once-loyal consumers feel that brands have done them an injustice by violating a perceived norm of fairness; under such conditions, they may retaliate by, for example, posting negative word of mouth about the brand. Johnson et al. (2011) find that brand relationships that are highly self-relevant are those that are most likely to be transformed into brand enmity that entails antibrand behaviors. And Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel (2004) find that relationship trajectories are a function not just of the consumer's relationship with the brand but also of brands' identities. For example, they find that brands positioned as "exciting" are less apt than those positioned as "sincere" to suffer relationship decay as a result of some transgression. These studies help illuminate why a particular fan will become a brand antagonist and indicate that characteristics of the brand itself (e.g., brand personality) matter to how consumers react when potentially destabilizing events, such as a brand transgression, occur. However, these studies do little to illuminate why the majority of an audience stops paying attention to a serial brand.

Consumer research on brand communities is more aligned with our audience level of analysis. Considerable work on brand communities has highlighted how they serve identity-reinforcing and affiliation need–related purposes for members (Kates 2004; Kozinets 2001; Muniz and Schau 2005). This research is helpful for understanding the importance of consumer-brand and consumer-consumer relationships within brand communities (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002), but it stops short of shedding light on audience dissipation. Potentially more relevant is brand community research that explores the common practices exhibited by members of brand communities (Schau et al. 2009). Although this work focuses on value creation and has been silent on audience dissipation, we view the practices it highlights as potentially relevant to both processes. Other relevant work at the collective level is that of Humphreys

FIGURE 1

AMERICA'S NEXT TOP MODEL NIELSEN RATINGS (2003–12)



(2013), which investigates not audience dissipation but audience formation in an "attention economy" (see also Humphreys and Kozinets 2009). Humphreys (2013) notes that attention is a scarce commodity in contemporary markets in which, for example, YouTube upstarts vie with established (person) brands for attention. She posits that a critical factor in accumulating an audience is for early fans to cultivate new fans by publicizing the work of the emerging attention-object. Although Humphreys stops short of elucidating how or why audiences may shift their attention away from an emerging or established brand, her focus on the roles of consumers in brand audience accumulation informs our investigation of their potential role in brand audience dissipation.

To summarize, the prior literature sensitizes us to considering that consumers can play a significant role in brand dynamics. It does not, however, illuminate consumers' potential to contribute to any kind of dissipative process. Our work thus investigates the negative dynamics that consumers, particularly those who are avid fans of brands, can contribute to.

METHOD

Context

To answer our research questions, we examined a reality television (TV) series once considered one of the most popular brands in its category (Marikar 2009): *America's Next Top Model* (ANTM). The series, created in 2003 by fashion model Tyra Banks, was broadcast twice a year for 10 years. In 2013, it reduced to a single season (called "cycle") per year; a total of 21 cycles have thus far been created. Every cycle features a small group of aspiring fashion models living together under one roof and competing over several weeks in various challenges. Each episode follows reality TV script convention as contestants' characters are revealed through the narration of their ongoing trials and tribulations. Insider tips and techniques are shared as industry professionals teach the contestants the art of modeling and the tacit norms of the fashion industry. The cycles' highlights include contestants' dramatic makeovers, trips to a new international destination each cycle, attendance at "go-sees" (i.e., casting calls), and a spectacular finale. At the end of each episode, a panel of expert judges led by Banks evaluates the aspiring models' weekly performances and eliminates one contestant. In the final episode of each cycle, a single contestant is awarded the ANTM title and prizes, such as a contract with a reputable modeling agency, a cover and spread in a fashion magazine, and a lucrative contract with a cosmetic brand.

Before concluding our description of the ANTM series, we review how its audience has altered over time. Drawing on data purchased from the Nielsen Company, we trace the trajectory of ANTM's audience. Although ANTM has been a successful brand for many years, its audience is now at risk of dissipation. Data shown in figure 1 indicate that while the series enjoyed relatively stable viewership until its ninth cycle (2007), it has experienced steady decline in viewership from cycle 10 onward.

Of course, it is possible that demand in the reality TV category may be softening, though we note that some of the most popular shows airing today are reality television shows. *Duck Dynasty*, for example, drew 11.8 million viewers in 2013, eclipsing the viewership total of any other reality TV show in history (Cohen 2013). We assert, therefore, that the decline in ANTM's viewership cannot be attributed merely to fatigue with the category. Thus, our research explores the audience dissipation of a brand that was once a global powerhouse with syndication in more than 100 countries.

Research Procedures

To examine the process by which a serial brand's audience dissipates, and how fans themselves affect brand audience dissipation, we adopted a longitudinal approach. We derive our data from a multisite netnography (Kozinets 2010), product and promotional materials, Nielsen Company national average TV ratings, and press commentaries.

First, from Spring 2007 to Spring 2009, while ANTM was at the height of its popularity, the first author became fully immersed in the brand community. Participant observation involved being engaged on ANTM-related discussion boards, specifically Television Without Pity (TWoP), Fans of Reality TV (FORT), Reality TV Games (RTVG), and The CW Model Lounge (selection was based on insight from preliminary offline interviews with fans and casual observation conducted as an audience member between 2005 and 2007). Engagement ranged from following specific discussion threads, to asking or answering questions, to participating in extensive discussions, and, occasionally, to exchanging e-mails or private messages with other fans and a former ANTM contestant. Participant observation also involved regular reading of media coverage (news and blogs) of ANTM using Google Alerts and watching ANTM, its franchises (e.g., *Canada's Next Top Model*), and competitor series (*The Janice Dickinson Modeling Agency*, *Make Me a Supermodel*, *A Model Life*, and *The Agency*). Immersion in the context also led to attending *The Tyra Banks Show* and *Next Top Model* auditions in New York City and Toronto. A few informal conversations were carried out with aspiring contestants, their friends, and their families. Topics of discussions addressed interest in the series, perceptions of fashion modeling, and reasons for attending auditions. Reports from participation at these events were shared with other fans. Finally, over the course of those 2 years, eight offline and two online formal interviews were conducted with fans of various sociocultural backgrounds (six females, four males, ranging from their early twenties to forties, living in Canada or the United States, and with occupations varying from students to professionals). Participants were recruited from a mix of online forums and snowballing. From Summer 2009 onward, as ANTM ratings were slipping and online activity was declining, the first author pursued observation and began monitoring ANTM social networking data through tweets, news feeds, and channels from the series official accounts on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Throughout the project, the netnographic data collected included publicly available user-generated content (e.g., posts on discussion boards, social networking sites and blogs, videos, memes, and fan art), interview transcripts, e-mails and private messages, and field notes.

Second, both authors collected all ANTM cycles as well as promotional materials (e.g., advertising posters, flyers, TV spots), evidence of prizes (e.g., winners' covers and ANTM-related profiles in magazines), memorabilia (e.g., dolls), and website materials (e.g., schedules) from ANTM's official network, The CW, and other syndicated North American networks.

Furthermore, to gain insight into the timing and magnitude of the brand's decline in popularity, we purchased national average TV ratings for 18 cycles of ANTM (2003–12) from the Nielsen Company. Finally, because of the depth of the coverage it devoted to the series (Hirschberg 2008) and its breadth of circulation (it has the second largest circulation in the United States and is distributed nationwide), we used press coverage from the *New York Times* to understand judges, contestants, and competition.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was an iterative process of interpreting; deriving new questions; searching for and collecting new data; and rejecting, confirming, and refining our emerging interpretation until reaching sufficient interpretive convergence and theoretical saturation. Following Kozinets (2010) and other scholars (Muniz and Schau 2005), we adopted netnographic conventions in our analysis, moving continuously among the various sources of data. We used ATLAS.ti software to assist in this process. As our focus on brand audience dissipation emerged, and as we applied concepts from assemblage theory to understand this phenomenon, our analysis focused on how fans exercised their capacities.

FINDINGS

We introduce our findings with a brief overview; in the paragraphs that follow we elaborate. Our theory suggests that after initial components of a brand are assembled by the producers and audience members, and components of intersecting brand assemblages are enrolled, changes to the components of the assemblage arise only partly owing to deliberate actions on the part of the brand's producers. As components change, new material and expressive capacities are introduced into the assemblage. Audience members who are most engaged with the brand, that is, fans, may—through their own capacities—interact with new components in ways that ultimately fuel dissipation of the larger audience of which they are a part. Before discussing our theoretical premises in detail, we identify the key founding components of the ANTM brand assemblage that producers of the brand enrolled at its inception, as well as components of intersecting brand assemblages, because these are the points of departure for the destabilizing process fueled by fans. We summarize our assemblage theoretic perspective on the ANTM brand in table 1. In this table, we highlight some

TABLE 1

OVERVIEW OF THE ANTM BRAND ASSEMBLAGE

Key components	Illustrative data	Focal capacities	Examples of components that interact with key component to allow realization of capacities
Components assembled by producers:			
Narratives (e.g., high fashion)	Opening frames from ANTM Cycle 7 and Cycle 9: 	*Expressive*: • Can fuel a segregation process that restricts the ANTM "territory" to those contestants with editorial modeling potential and positions the brand as belonging within the fashion world	• Industry insider judges • Prizes from prestigious fashion sponsors • Tall, thin, young contestants • Recurring contestant character type such as "the ugly duckling"

TABLE 1 (*Continued*)

Key components	Illustrative data	Focal capacities	Examples of components that interact with key component to allow realization of capacities
Contestants	Fan post critiquing a contestant's performance (Lisa Jackson, Cycle 9) using an official picture shared by ANTM producers (Fireangel, The CW Model Lounge, October 14, 2007): "I just LOVE this pic... from the waist up. Let's go through it one thing at a time. Face: The expression is perfect for the shot; intense beauty staring you defiantly, as if nature herself is coming to claim you. The makeup is great; gives the model an east asian look that goes perfectly with the idea that she is a bamboo spirit folk. The hair is great; a classic pulp-era style that was popular in the far east gives it an almost "Indiana Jones" feel. The Body: from the long neck, visible despite the angle of the head, to the long, athletic arm, athletic shoulder and upper chest, she shows off her length and natural, lean beauty. The body makeup is subtle, yet works on an almost subconscious level to enhance her body. The background setting is exquisite, it blends with her skin tone to enhance the feeling of her being a kami, and the leaves that form her bustier make it seem as if the is just emerging from wherever it is that spirits come from. Of course, there is a downside... one that actually makes me angry because it is so darn silly: What the heck is it with the panty-hose? That looks like panty-hose, NOT like a bikini bottom or some kind of shorts. It TOTALLY destroys the illusion of her being a nature spirit, because... y'know, like... nature spirits don't wear L'eggs Pantyhose ™... The belt? It is SO out of place it's not even funny. Why is a bamboo spirit wearing a leather belt? To go out with her biker lilac friends? And that green thing around her waist... it can't be bamboo, because it is going horizontally around her waist and is entirely the wrong colour for the bamboo seen in the rest of the pic. It was a bad choice on the dresser's behalf. As far as I am concerned, just crop the pic at the waist or photoshop a bunch of bamboo into it to cover her from the waist down. Then the pic might near perfection." (fireangel, The Model Lounge (The CW), October, 14, 2007) 	*Material*: • Can embody editorial modeling elements of high fashion • Can demonstrate editorial modeling skills	• High fashion narrative • Recurring contestant character types • Sets, clothing, accessories, make-up, hair products, and props • Sponsors • Industry insider judges

Recurring contestant character types (e.g., the underdog)	ANTM Cycle 9 underdog Heather Kuzmich in *People Magazine*, December 17, 2007:  	*Material*: • Can embody a popular archetype *Expressive*: • Can share an entertaining biographical story	• Meritocracy narrative • Industry insider judges • Media coverage • Fan art
Industry insider judges	ANTM Cycle 15, episode 6, judges at panel. From left to right: André Leon Talley of *Vogue*; Tyra Banks; Nigel Barker, fashion photographer; and guest judge Patrick Demarchelier, fashion photographer: 	*Material*: • Can embody the institution of high fashion *Expressive*: • Can share expert knowledge on editorial modeling and high fashion • Can convey authority and fairness reinforcing narrative of meritocracy	• High fashion narrative • Media coverage • Sets (dividing judges from contestants at panel)

TABLE 1 (*Continued*)

Key components	Illustrative data	Focal capacities	Examples of components that interact with key component to allow realization of capacities
Audience members (e.g., fans)	Fan art from banner contest thread (ax80, FORT, February 13, 2008): 	*Material*: • Can pay attention to the series' key components • Can produce user-generated content about the series' key components *Expressive*: • Can interpret other components of ANTM as consistent or inconsistent with one another	• Contestants' photographs • Sponsors' branded ANTM products • ANTM threads on discussion boards • Media coverage
Components shared with intersecting brand assemblages:			
Discussion boards (e.g., *FORT*)	FORT's ANTM fan art thread: 	*Material*: • Can provide space for interaction and archiving artifacts	• Fan discussion • Fan art • Media coverage of fan activity

Media (e.g., *Jezebel*)

Coverage of fan detective work (*Jezebel.com*, November 29, 2007):

Material:
- Can disseminate components to wider audiences
- Can produce collectables for fans

Expressive:
- Can interpret components of ANTM as consistent or inconsistent with one another

- Narratives
- ANTM gossip
- ANTM threads on discussion boards
- ANTM advertising
- ANTM sponsors' advertising

Sponsors (e.g., Elite Model Management)

"Composite cards" (or modeling CVs) of past contestants Joanie Dodds, (Cycle 6) and Heather Kuzmich (Cycle 9):

Material:
- Can embody opportunities in editorial fashion modeling
- Can provide fans with collectibles

Expressive:
- Can offer contestants prestigious prizes

- Contestants
- High fashion and meritocracy narratives

specific material and/or expressive capacities of components that matter to the process of interest here. However, it should be noted that, as Delanda (2006, 12) points out, any given component may have both material and expressive capacities. Thus, our examples are illustrative but not exhaustive of the capacities of the components we review. In fact, any component can have capacities that resonate with those of multiple others.

An Assemblage Theoretic Characterization of the ANTM Brand

Given that assemblages "have no overarching unity but instead establish a degree of consistency which allows for them to be analyzed as *an* assemblage" and that "the scope of the assemblage is determined by the theorist and the factors that are significant to the study" (Srnicek 2006, 56–57), we chose to focus on key components that we believe interact to form the ANTM brand assemblage. In doing so, we first identified a set of narratives that were enrolled into the assemblage. The wider contexts in which brands come into existence contain many *cultural narratives*—a term we use here, like Thompson and Haytko (1997), to refer to widely familiar cultural notions or archetypes. Our analysis indicates that three such narratives were components assembled in the early phases of ANTM and that these interacted with other components with varying material and expressive capacities. All of the initial components helped stabilize or "territorialize" the brand assemblage's identity by "increasing its degree of internal homogeneity or the degree of sharpness of its boundaries" (DeLanda 2006, 12). The first is the *narrative of high fashion.* In the field of fashion, haute couture garments custom-made by a select group of fashion designers (http://www.modeaparis.com/en/federation/) embody the notion of high fashion as artifacts and practices that are trendsetting, artistic, and exclusive. In the field of modeling, the narrative of high fashion is inextricably linked with certain kinds of contracts, known in the industry as "editorial work," that involve demonstration of artistic sensibility (Parmentier, Fischer, and Reuber 2013). Among modeling insiders, only a select subset of models are regarded as having the editorial looks or unconventional beauty that deviates from popular taste but that allows them to engage credibly in editorial work (Entwistle 2002).

The high fashion narrative had the capacity to fuel what DeLanda refers to as a "segregation process" (2006, 13) in that it limited the appropriate territory of the ANTM brand assemblage to modelesque material bodies. At its inception, ANTM's premise was that it would only feature contestants capable of getting editorial modeling work. It was purportedly for this reason that producers did not allow fan voting, a practice common in other reality TV competitions. In the words of ANTM's producers:

> Unlike the world of *American Idol* which is "you like that singer or you don't like that singer," the fashion world is very different because there are very specific skills and very specific looks that the fashion world wants and that much differs from mainstream popular taste. So, we really couldn't have the American public vote on this one. We had to have a panel of true fashion experts who could make that decision. (Ken Mok, *Special Features: Reliving the First Season ANTM Cycle 1 DVD,* 2005)

By opining that consumers were incapable of recognizing the selective tastes and knowledge of the fashion field and claiming that industry insiders were the only ones with this capacity, ANTM producers contributed to the territorialization of the brand as high fashion.

The second founding narrative component is the *narrative of meritocracy*. This narrative is particularly prevalent in North America and suggests that an individual's advancement will be the outcome of his or her ability and achievements (Frank and Cook 1995). In its ideal form, this narrative affirms that no barriers, such as social class or race, will be impediments to "getting ahead" so long as one works hard and has the requisite talents (Stahl 2002, 221). This narrative is not unique to ANTM, but it is common across reality TV programming (Murray and Ouellette 2009). On ANTM, judges are the guardians of the narrative of meritocracy. In their discussions of the merits of each contestant that are "materialized" (a term borrowed from Entwistle and Slater [2013], who use it to refer to making a component of an assemblage tangible) through the broadcast of carefully edited montages, the judges ultimately decide who truly has "what it takes to be . . . *America's Next Top Model*" (see fig. 2).

The third founding narrative is what we refer to as *girls-behaving-badly*. We define this as a celebration of the cattiness found in "girly-girl" culture (Orenstein 2011). One blogger from the entertainment news website Wetpaint provides an illustrative summary of how this narrative manifested itself in the brand assemblage by highlighting the regular physical and verbal displays of mean behavior:

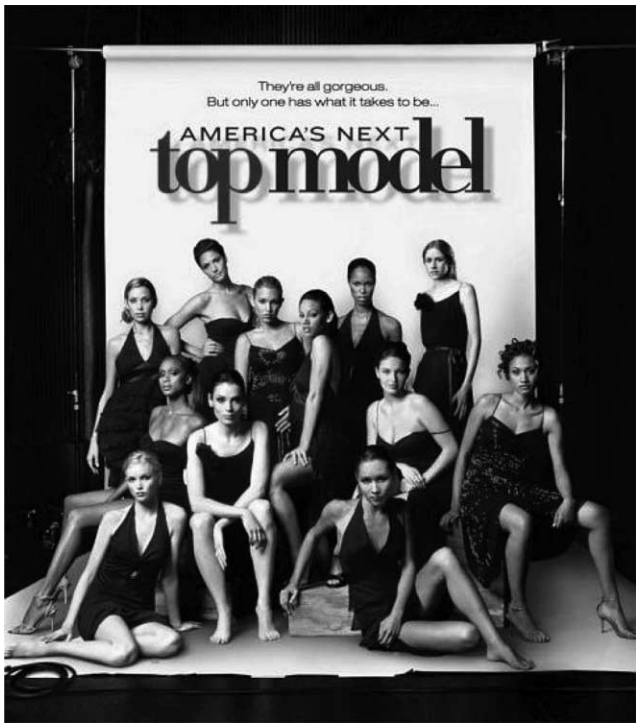
> The trouble with women living together (never mind competing for a modeling contract and living together) is that a fight can erupt over anything—lotion, dish detergent, Mentos. And those are just the really serious arguments. There are also those daily spats rooted in some tragic misstep: someone pronounces a word incorrectly, breathes weird, or makes a strange face while eating salt and vinegar chips only to have a roommate accuse her of sabotage. (Lauren Bull, Wetpaint, August 11, 2010)

This narrative has been materialized through the series' advertising campaigns (with taglines such as "Being beautiful can get really ugly: 10 women, 8 weeks, 1 house" [Cycle 1] or "Welcome to the jungle, ladies" [Cycle 8]) and infamous fight scenes. The scenes have not only aired during the series, but they have also been compiled, curated, and shared among fans via platforms with material capacities such as YouTube (e.g., "ANTM-Ode to the catfights" http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4pJubY47wI).

These founding narratives interact with a range of other components with varying material and expressive capacities, such as sets (e.g., a hip loft with contemporary furniture

FIGURE 2

ADVERTISING, ANTM CYCLE 2 (*UNITED PARAMOUNT NETWORK*, 2004)



where contestants share rooms as real models do when they travel on assignments) and locations (e.g., New York City, the heart of the American fashion industry, where the cast is filmed in familiar fashion locales). In what follows, we highlight a subset of these components that were originally integral parts of the brand assemblage and that contributed to stabilizing its identity by complementing the founding narratives.

The first is *contestants*. Contestants, at least those who are tall, thin, and atypical in their beauty, are key in the ANTM brand assemblage as they materialize the high fashion narrative. Particular episodes showcase contestants' bodies in different ways as they try to learn the ropes of editorial modeling. For example, contestants are shown learning to catwalk, displaying diverse emotions while on camera, strutting in stilettos, experimenting with dramatic make-up, and struggling into clothing that may be too tight or made of unyielding fabric. Producers often contrive to heighten the challenges faced (and further focus on the materiality of contestants bodies) by creating especially difficult physical conditions. For example, in Cycle 9, episode 5, contestants were tasked with finding the right angles for posing for the camera while jumping on a trampoline. Moreover, footage that does not center on modeling challenges per se regularly focuses on contestants actively trying to maintain peak physical conditioning through extreme beauty routines (e.g., Brazilian waxing, Cycle 1, episode 1), onerous dieting, strenuous weight-lifting, or undergoing drastic hairstyles changes during the staple makeover episode. Contestants' bodies and the material artifacts produced in conjunction with them (e.g., photographs, performances on runways, or film advertisements for sponsors) are not only dissected in exquisite detail by judges and other industry insiders (who, in doing so, reaffirm the exclusive character of the world of editorial modeling that feeds into the high fashion narrative) but also by fans who appropriate the judges' critical tone and provide vivid reviews, as illustrated by fan Fireangel in table 1.

Contestants' edited personae also play an important role in supporting ANTM's key narratives, creating what we refer to as *recurring contestant character types*. Although more than 200 contestants have appeared on the series, a small set of recurring character types has consistently been enacted by contestants (Fetters 2013). Recurring types are often important components of reality TV programming; they are made manifest through characters with particular material capacities, such as a certain physical appearance, and expressive capacities, such as a compelling biographical story. Through the editing and production processes entailed in a reality TV series, these capacities are realized (Burnett 2001; Hearn 2006). On ANTM, the "ugly duckling," the "underdog, and the "mean girl" are three noteworthy recurring types. The inclusion of each enhances the potential for the expressive capacities of the three narratives to be realized. The "ugly duckling" character type is closely associated with the high fashion narrative in the modeling field. Stories abound of successful models who were, as children, teased for being too tall or too thin or for being ugly (Entwistle 2002). Like Hans Christian Andersen's misfit who eventually found his place among beautiful swans, odd-looking young women may find that they belong with another kind of elegant species: editorial fashion models. ANTM contestants Shandy Sullivan (Cycle 2) and Cycle 15 winner Ann Ward typify this archetype. Ugly ducklings have the material capacity to model, but only through their interaction with the narrative of high fashion.

The "underdog" constitutes a second character type and resonates with the narrative of meritocracy. Paharia et al. (2011) find that consumers appreciate brands positioned as underdogs who come from behind to succeed; such character types are also popular in competition-based reality TV (Paharia, Keinan, and Avery 2011). On ANTM, contestants like Heather Kuzmich (Cycle 9) embody the underdog type. The link between such a character and the narrative of meritocracy is reflected in the following:

> Heather Kuzmich has the neurological disorder known as Asperger's syndrome. She is socially awkward, has trouble making eye contact and is sometimes the target of her roommates' jokes. . . . A gifted art student from Valparaiso, Ind., she has a lean and angular look well suited to the fashion industry. . . . Early in the show, she appears socially isolated, the girls whisper about her within earshot, and viewers see her crying on the phone to her mother. . . . But while

> Heather's odd mannerisms separate her from her roommates, those same traits translate as on-the-edge high fashion in her modeling sessions. . . . Ms. Banks, the '60s-era model Twiggy, and the fashion photographer Nigel Barker, who all appear on the show, marvel at Heather's ability to connect with the camera. (Tara Parker-Pope, *New York Times*, December 4, 2007)

Media observations such as these (which have both expressive and material capacities) reflect and reinforce the underdog character type and its link with the narrative of meritocracy.

The "mean girl" is a third recurring contestant character type, and it fits with the girls-behaving-badly narrative. Through physical and verbal displays of aggressive behavior and bullying, the mean girl amplifies tensions between contestants and ignites malicious melodrama. Jade Cole (Cycle 6), who famously reminded her peers that ANTM did not stand for "America's Next Top Best Friend" (episode 3); Bianca Golden (Cycles 9 and 17); and Alexandria Everett (Cycles 16 and 17) are just a subset of contestants who have embodied this character type.

Industry insider judges constitute the third key component that we identify as providing support to the brand assemblage's identity. Figures recognized for their cultural capital within the fashion modeling field, such as mod-icon Twiggy, American *Vogue* contributing editor André Leon Talley, and one-time supermodel Paulina Porizkova, have all, at various times, held regular positions on the judging panel. Their presence clearly reinforces the high fashion narrative. Moreover, outspoken cast member Janice Dickinson (another former supermodel) also contributed to the girls-behaving-badly narrative by enacting an antagonistic relationship with Tyra Banks both during episodes of the program and when giving interviews in other venues.

Audience members can also be regarded as critical components of ANTM (as would be the case for any serial brand assemblage). Consistent with previous definitions offered by media scholars such as McQuail (1997), we define audience members as any of those who are paying attention to the show in some manner, whether watching during the initial airing of episodes, watching reruns, or participating in online forums without actually watching most episodes. Without doubt, the audience for ANTM is heterogeneous, including some deeply engaged fans, who may feel a sense of attachment (Thomson 2006) to the brand, some who feel a sense of community (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001) with others who consume the brand, and some who are merely occasional viewers. One key material capacity of all people who are part of an assemblage is their focal attention (DeLanda 2006, 50), and to the extent that audience members pay attention, they are integral to the stability of the brand. Especially given that audience attention is aggregated and materialized as audience ratings, collected, for example, by Nielsen, audience member attention is critical to the brand. Fan's expressive capacities to interpret components of ANTM in various ways are also considerable, especially when elements of the intersecting assemblages discussed below afford them the opportunity to share their interpretations with one another and for those interpretations to be widely disseminated.

Before discussing intersecting assemblage per se, we note that audience members who are components of the ANTM assemblage are almost inevitably components of other brand assemblages as well. This ability of individuals to be part of multiple assemblages, and to enter into or withdraw from some assemblages, is well recognized (DeLanda 2006).

Key Brand Assemblages Intersecting with ANTM

Any assemblage intersects, that is, shares components, with other contemporaneous assemblages (DeLanda 2006). The ANTM brand assemblage intersects with many other assemblages, such as the families of the cast and crew; the neighborhoods, cities, and countries where filming happens; and the technological networks (e.g., cable providers, Internet service providers) that diffuse or stream the series. Of interest to our research questions are the intersecting assemblages that share portions of the audience component of the ANTM brand assemblage. We find that three key assemblages, all brand assemblages of their own, have interacted in ways that either stabilized or destabilized ANTM brand's assemblage identity and contributed to the brand audience dissipation process.

One notable type of intersecting brand assemblage, given the material capacities of the components shared with ANTM, is the *network of discussion boards*. Discussion boards such as FORT or TWoP have been important to ANTM because one component they feature is threads that provide a space where ANTM fans can engage with one another and share information, opinions, and artifacts such as fan art or memes on episodes, contestants, and judges. As our analysis below will reveal, to understand the role of the expressive and material capacities exercised by fans in the dissipation of the ANTM audience, it is essential to take into account the material capacities provided by discussion boards with threads devoted to ANTM. In addition, the behavioral norms on some boards entail specific expressive capacities such as humor or irony; TWoP, for example, has featured and fostered posts that display witty sarcasm.

A second notable type of intersecting brand assemblage that shares audience components with ANTM is *media that covers the entertainment industry*. This includes outlets devoted specifically to covering the TV shows (e.g., *TV Guide*) or celebrities (e.g., *US Weekly*) and sections within more general media (e.g., *New York Times*) that cover the industry. Of particular interest to our analysis is media that report on fans' reactions to dynamics in the ANTM brand assemblage.

Prestigious fashion brands that sponsor the series are a third important type of intersecting brand assemblage. Prestigious fashion brands include established fashion media outlets, fashion model management agencies, and fashion product marketers that routinely use editorial models in their advertising. Components of these brands can allow the high fashion and meritocracy narratives to take material form. For example, when ANTM winners are awarded contracts

with reputable modeling agencies such as IMG Models or Elite Model Management and are featured on magazine covers and in editorial spreads for brands in such established media as *Elle Magazine* or *Vogue Italia*, the narratives are instantiated through images and objects that fans can own, collect, and share.

Dynamics of Audience Dissipation

Having established what we regard as the components that contributed most to ANTM's identity from the outset, we now examine how fans of this serial brand contributed to the destabilization of that identity. We do so by highlighting three ongoing elements of a process through which fans exercise material and expressive capacities in ways that destabilize the assemblage. We label the process elements *reframing*, *remixing*, and *rejecting*, and we elaborate on and illustrate each element of the process. Before doing so, however, we stipulate that these elements of the process are analytically distinct but practically intertwined, such that each element can feed into and reinforce the other elements in a nonsequential fashion.

Reframing. We introduce the term reframing to refer to ongoing process elements that involve directing attention to and categorizing contradictions. DeLanda (2006, 50) highlights that people's focused attention has a powerful material capacity that can be deployed by individuals within assemblages. When fans direct that attention to new elements that are entering an assemblage, they may produce associative links between new and old elements that strengthen the identity of the assemblage by grouping things together through relations of resemblance (DeLanda 2006, 48). However, focused attention may result in heightening the contrasts and contradictions between existing and new elements, a framing that may spill over into the view of the wider audience when materialized on discussion boards and/or reported by the media.

For example, fans of ANTM played this contradiction-catalyzing role when they began to pay focused attention to a new component—which we refer to as the *persona-branding narrative*—that initially became entangled with ANTM by virtue of its growing association with ANTM producer and host Tyra Banks. On June 1, 2008, the *New York Times* ran an extensive profile on Banks, describing her migration from celebrity model to media mogul (see fig. 3).

By 2008, Banks was both anchoring ANTM, the top-rated show for The CW network with countless international adaptations (e.g., *Canada's Next Top Model*), and performing daily on her daytime Emmy-winning talk show *Tyra*. Through these and other ventures, Banks was earning more than any other woman on prime-time TV (US$30 million; Rose 2009) and attracting more than 13 million viewers weekly (Hirschberg 2008). The *Top Model* creator, who wanted to build "an empire like Oprah's" (Samuel and Peyser 2004), was transforming into a brand of her own.

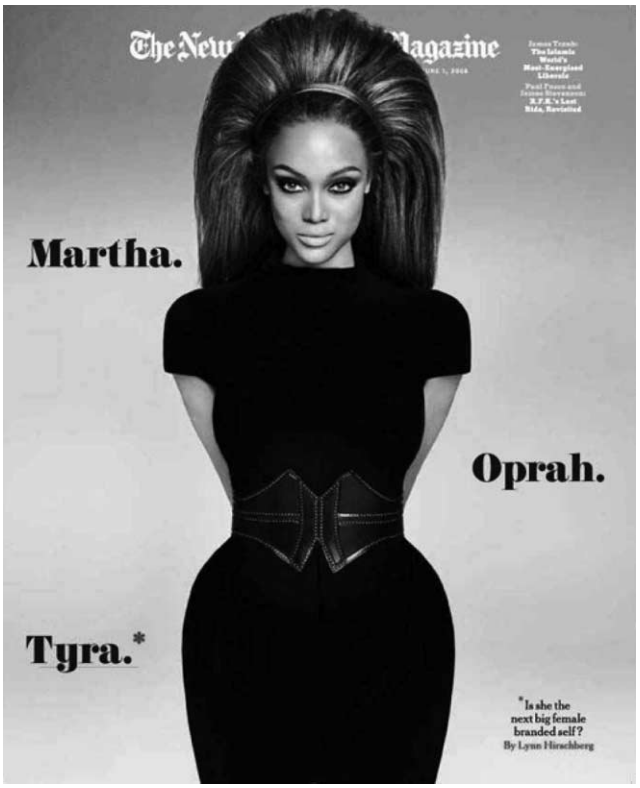
Although Banks's high profile as a model was seen as consistent with the show's high fashion narrative and had been an important component in drawing viewers to ANTM, fans paying attention to her new persona categorized it as discordant with other components of the ANTM assemblage and as clashing with her original role as a modeling mentor. Fans active in the Tyra Banks thread on TWoP expressed this disconnect between Tyra's new persona and her original role as follows:

> I think Tyra makes ANTM; I couldn't imagine it without her. I really liked cycles 1–3 because she was more involved and this was all before she decided to become a plump talk-show host. The woman knows how to model and she was a really good mentor in modelling-related issues from cycles 1–3. . . . She said herself that she puts on a "dramatic" voice for the ANTM eliminations and I just love the cheesy-ness. If Tyra just learned to leave the "Tyra Show" Tyra at the studio and spent more time coaching the girls in how to model, I'm sure a lot of people would be back on the Banks-Wagon. (Youdee, TWoP, May 30, 2006)

> I used to LOVE Tyra. I read all the *Seventeen* magazine with her on the covers. I thought her CG [Cover Girl] ads were cute, I even liked her in the first three seasons of ANTM. I can almost still stand her now, I just have to look at pictures

FIGURE 3

TYRA BANKS'S COVER FOR *NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE* (JUNE 1, 2008)



> of her when she was a real model to remember why Tyra is amazing. I do not, however, love talk-show Tyra. . . . Sometimes, Tyra, it is not all about you. Stick to modeling. (LovinTheHawk, TWoP, June 19, 2006)

Producers of the show, perhaps unaware of or indifferent to the fan reaction to the introduction of the persona-branding narrative, further entangled it with the ANTM assemblage when they extended it beyond Tyra to the actual contestants. Although originally there were no mentions of contestants needing to create individual personae, by 2011 the practice of requiring them to do so had become entrenched. In Cycle 17, titled "All Stars," returning contestants were explicitly instructed in how to build their own brands. The caustic abstract below, taken from a formal TWoP recap provides an illustration:

> Tyra introduces her small manfriend as Martin Lindstrom, a global branding expert. . . . Apparently he is a genius, who wrote a book called *Brandwashed: Tricks Companies Use to Manipulate Our Minds and Persuade Us to Buy*. . . . He's going to help the girls to corral their 15 minutes of fame into a life-long career. . . . Tyra leaves, and Martin starts talking to the girls in an accent from the country of Foreignia. He says that they've done pretty well so far, but he hasn't seen them on any magazine covers or TV shows recently. Well, they're on *America's Next Top Model* right now, aren't they? Martin says there's a huge step they have to take now to get to the point of world domination, and that is branding. Martin says that branding is all about one word. For example, if Martin says "cowboy" you think about one particular tobacco brand. . . . What's Martin's branding word? Mock turtleneck? Shyster? Martin and the crack team of *ANTM* researchers have talked to fans to get perceptions of the girls, and now he's about to share info about their public images with them. (Potes, TWoP, September 26, 2011)

Fans observing the new focus on persona-branding were quick to characterize it as disparate from the treasured high fashion narrative that had been part of the original ANTM assemblage. As one fan put it: "I really find it ironic that this show is now focusing on 'branding' more than modeling. . . . How would you expect consumers to buy your products that you sell when in fact the show has already 'given' them a brand?" (MickeyMouse, RTVG, May 2, 2012). Another fan noted:

> The 'branding's*** has been the final nail in the coffin for ANTM. . . . At least the show used to pretend it was about finding serious working models, now it seems to be about making yourself a D-list reality TV star. I mean, why is releasing a [recording] single part of the winners prize for a modelling show? Designers, editors etc. don't want girls with a really strong identity/look too. They want a blank canvas that they can turn into what they want. Later in a model's career when they want to branch out, maybe, but ANTM girls are NOT at that level. (Vague, RTGV, May 3, 2012)

As this last fan post clearly illustrates, fans paying attention to the introduction of the persona-brand component classify it as directly contradicting the narrative of high fashion, which emphasizes that editorial models are meant to be blank slates whose fame in no way interferes with branding of the products they are selling (Parmentier et al. 2013).

To provide another illustration of how fan attention and categorization can heighten assemblage heterogeneity, we discuss what happened when producers decided to begin including contestants whose faces or body types deviate from the ideals of the fashion industry. Attentive fans of ANTM were quick to note a disconnect between the materiality of contestants who are average in height and weight or conventionally pretty in looks and the narrative of high fashion, which insists that editorial models are unconventional in terms of their height, slimness, and form of beauty. As one fan writes:

> I . . . don't see the point in "normal" girls competing on a modeling show. . . . At the very least they could, you know, actually pick hamsters [fan slang for contestants] who *look* like models. (KFC, TWoP, November 18, 2005)

Fan reactions to individual contestants who deviated in appearance from editorial models, however, were modest in comparison with their reaction to Cycle 13, in which the producers decided to feature only "petites" (i.e., women 5 feet and 7 inches and under) as competitors. The following thread illustrates how fans framed this decision as being in direct contradiction to the show's founding high fashion narrative. The first post, from Milkyaqua, begins with a quotation (with capitalization added for effect) from the directions issued by the producers when casting for Cycle 13:

> Quote: "8. You must be AT OR UNDER five feet and seven inches (5′7″) in height, although Producers reserve the right to make case-by-case exceptions. Please note the change in this requirement from past cycles of the Series."
>
> Good grief what on earth does Tyra have planned for number 13? Both the application and the eligibility requirements state the same thing about the height so I don't think it's a typo. (milkyaqua, TwoP, February 17, 2009)
>
> It's a joke right? Casting models under 5′7″? Haha Tyra, you can come out now and release the actual application. (soBlu, TWoP, February 17, 2009)
>
> I guess America's Next Top Petite Model? Surely she won't have them do runway. I mean, I understand because there *is* a petite modeling market, so if she aims it completely and totally toward that I guess it would be the bitchiness and campiness that I enjoy otherwise, but I'm just not going to deal with it if she tries to put these girls in the same arena with conventional modeling. (JAZ853, TWoP, February 18, 2009)
>
> I swear if this is true, I'm totally gonna boycott this show. (sfs324, TWoP, February 18, 2009)
>
> I don't think there is a petite model market. Maybe commercial, but even then most commercial models hover around

> 5′6″ or so. . . . So maybe she's teaching them all how to be catalog? Also, this would totally change the prizes. Well, at least the contract with Elite. (nicenessness, TWoP, February 18, 2009)
>
> If this is true, I wish Tyra would make a new show, not at the expense at another cycle. I agree that the girls shouldn't be taught about editorial poses, and the competition should be commercial/catalogue focused. (themilkshakeman, TWoP, February 18, 2009)
>
> I mean, as someone who's short I suppose I'm less opposed to it than others, especially if petite catalog/commercial/whatever is an option, but I'm not in the mood to watch her CHANGE THE INDUSTRY with some poor hamster, and then not really change it. She'll probably go on about how Twiggy is 5′4″.
>
> I will be *very* interested to see if *Elite* and *Cover Girl* stay with her that cycle. (JAZ853, TWoP, February 18, 2009)
>
> I guess we'll find out on 28 Feb when the first open call happens. It plainly states on both the application and eligibility requirements that they want 5′7″ and under and to note the change from previous cycles. That's why I don't think it's a joke or a mistake/typo. It's cycle 13 so who knows what Tyra has planned but I'm curious as to who the sponsors/modeling agency are going to be since several of you have brought that up. It's a legit question for sure because all the eligibility requirements says is that the grand prize will include a contract with a modeling agency. (milkyaqua, TWoP, February 18, 2009)
>
> It's possible the typo was not found on both the eligibility and the application, is it possible that someone could call The CW or email the producers about this? I might have to give up ANTM for a cycle if the girls are all 5′5″. (soBlu, TWoP, February 18, 2009)
>
> Could she maybe be focusing solely on spokes model work? Acting and actual commercials only? Like, something you'd be on a talent board for but not a model board? We should have all seen this coming eventually. (JAZ853, TWoP, February 19, 2009)
>
> Tyra has lost her mind! At this point what is the difference between ANTM and The Bad Girls Club???!!! There is no way I am watching a show that doesn't even *pretend* to be about modeling. (ags, TWoP, February 19, 2009)

This conversation nicely illustrates how fans paying attention to new components of the brand can exert their capacities in their interpretations of contradictions between components of the brand assemblage. In the first post of this string, Milkyaqua draws on texts issued by the show's producers (the changed eligibility requirements for Cycle 13), alerting others that the producers appear to be doing something so contradictory to the show's other components that it must be a mistake. The initial sense of disbelief at the seeming incongruence between petite models and the high fashion narrative, echoed by others, gives way to a consideration of the implications for fit between this new component and others. For example, it would be incongruous, in JAZ853's opinion, for petite contestants to "do runway." Both Nicenessness and Milkyaqua also point out that it would be incongruous for a petite model to be given the prize of a contract with Elite Model Management. By highlighting the contradictions between preexisting and new components, these fans lay the groundwork for the destabilization of the brand's identity in the eyes of others. Their stated intentions of ceasing to watch as a result of these contradictions further suggest the consequences of such destabilization.

The notion that the addition of new components to a serial brand assemblage could trigger a process that undermines that brand seems contradictory to the literature on satiation, which has argued that consumers become satiated after repeated exposure to a brand with certain attributes and that introducing variety can reduce satiation (Nelson, Meyvis, and Galak 2009; Schumann, Petty, and Clemons 1990; Sood and Drèze 2006). However, the satiation literature has not taken into account the possibility that, for serial brands that audiences attempt to understand as they evolve, fans will interpret some new components as contradictory, even if other new components complement and help stabilize a brand assemblage by refreshing it.

Remixing. The term remixing refers to (co-)creating material artifacts that increase assemblage heterogeneity. DeLanda (2006, 13) argues that processes that increase the internal heterogeneity of an assemblage help to deterritorialize its identity. Our analysis indicates that fans can contribute to such a process by introducing into the assemblage material artifacts that have precisely this assemblage-level effect. To illustrate, we discuss what became known as "Scandaleisha," an event that unfolded during Cycle 9.

Like other talent-based reality TV programs, cycles of ANTM typically began with audition footage of the contestants. During episode 1 of Cycle 9, contestant Saleisha Stowers, prompted by Tyra Banks herself, revealed to the audience that she had attended Banks's "T-Zone self-esteem camp just for girls" as a teenager and thus had a prior connection with the executive producer before entering the competition. Possibly to minimize perceptions of a potential conflict of interest, Banks then said that because she knew Saleisha, she was going to be tougher on her. Despite this assertion, the revelation provoked suspicion among dedicated fans who believed this prior connection could constitute an unfair advantage for Stowers.

This suspicion prompted fans to seek information that ANTM's producers had not provided and to import it into the assemblage. Indeed, fan detective work and the creation of collective intelligence is common for reality TV brands (Jenkins 2006). What is important about the case at hand, however, is that the information provided by fans was heterogeneous with other components of the assemblage, such

as the program's eligibility rules. As fans quickly discovered and reported on discussion boards, Stowers had prior experience that violated one of the long-standing eligibility requirements publicized by the show, Eligibility Rule No. 10: "You must not have previous experience as a model in a national campaign including appearances on television" (http://www.cwtv.com/images/topmodel/antm_cycle9_eligibility.pdf). The media was quick to pick up on and amplify the heterogeneous materials being imported onto discussion boards by fans. For example, one media outlet reported: "Sharp-eyed fans soon dug up footage showing Saleisha walking the catwalk in an ANTM cycle-six fashion show, as well as appearing on the runway in an episode of *The Tyra Banks Show*. Viewers also found that Saleisha had appeared in a nationwide Wendy's commercial that aired in 2006" (Hall 2007).

In what became some of the lengthiest series of posts ever created on ANTM-focused discussion boards, fans created comment after comment that highlighted the disconnect between Saleisha's advancement through the cycle and the brand's founding narrative of meritocracy. The following conversation, which took place soon after episode 3 when Stowers' poor performance landed her in the bottom two, is illustrative:

> *Re: Saleisha—Cycle 9*
>
> I was watching the [ANTM] cycle 6 marathon on MTV and did anyone else notice that she [Saleisha] was in the Gen Art fashion show that the girls went to after their makeovers? (sourpatch, FORT, October 6, 2007)
>
> YESSS!!!!! And I took pics with my phone . . . will post in a minute! I knew I saw her!! (ANTM Addict!, FORT, October 6, 2007)
>
> Lol, I looked at those pictures and didn't think it was her, then I turned on that episode on my DVR and, lo and behold, there she was! (It's actually episode 3, if you count auditions.) Interesting . . . think it's a conspiracy? (StarrieEyedKat, FORT, October 6, 2007)

As the cycle progressed, and fan detective work accrued, material artifacts at odds with the narrative of meritocracy accumulated apace. One fan wrote of Stowers:

> I think she's incredibly unattractive, both physically and behaviorally and she's yet to show me any real "model" in her, despite all her experience and the great judges comments and blah blah blah. . . . It's so obvious they are propping her. (watchergirl, TWoP, November 15, 2007)

Another said:

> If Saleisha wins I think I'll really do my damnedest not to watch this show anymore. Unless she makes a major improvement (which I highly doubt) then the 1% of credibility they have left will be flushed down the toilet if she wins. (RealChic1999, TWoP, November 15, 2007)

To highlight the collectivity of the audience process within the ANTM brand assemblage, we note that this TWoP thread alone, that is, "S9: Saleisha," garnered more that 2,500 replies, 657 of which occurred while Cycle 9 was airing. Moreover, there have been more than 275,000 views of this thread, suggesting that the widespread disgruntlement and increasing defection of audience members was fueled by their access to the musings of other fans.

On December 12, 2007, Saleisha Stowers won the ninth cycle of ANTM. Her win prompted even greater levels of fan reaction that destabilized the brand's identity by increasing assemblage heterogeneity. Comments such as the following abounded:

> We're in an era of unaccountability in America right now. . . . I guarantee that Tyra and her cronies will let Saleisha take the title and the heat while they formulate a strategy to justify their "absentmindedness" on Saleisha's past. . . . They have become masters at spin and they don't really give a damn what the fans think as long as the ratings are right. I think that is unfortunate because the arrogance of knowingly letting a girl connected to the host into the competition in the first place must have made Tyra feel invincible. (Sain, TWoP, December 14, 2007)

During Cycle 9 and immediately afterward, fans were particularly engaged in creating material artifacts sometimes referred to as bricolage (Jenkins 1992). Figure 4 provides an example in which a fan satirically adapted Roger Har-

FIGURE 4

SATIRICAL FAN-MADE BRICOLAGE (CLRDELUN, FORT, APRIL 17, 2008)

greaves's *Little Miss Sunshine* to feature Saleisha's infamous haircut. With its unequivocal title "Little Miss Cheater," this artifact, which once created remains accessible to members of the audience as well as to intersecting media assemblages, stands in direct contrast to the brand's narrative of meritocracy.

We contrast the role of fan art in heightening assemblage heterogeneity with the role assigned to consumer-generated content as an evangelizing practice in Schau et al. (2009). Complimentary consumer-generated content can complement other components of an assemblage, as Schau et al. (2009) report. However, we posit that less complementary (that is intended to be less complimentary) forms of fan art and of other material artifacts that fans enroll into the brand assemblage have the potential to destabilize brand identity if they accumulate and heighten its heterogeneity.

Rejecting. The term *rejecting* refers to framing replacement elements as lacking critical capacities. In this third component of the process we have identified, fans' expressive capacities are highlighted. In this facet of the process, fans deploy these capacities to frame exiting components of an assemblage as having had material and expressive capacities that replacement components lack. In theory, as DeLanda (2006) highlights, elements of assemblages can exit and be replaced without much threat to the identity of an assemblage, as long as the capacities of other components are sufficient. Indeed, at the end of a cycle of ANTM, a set of contestants "graduates" from the assemblage only to be replaced by new ones in the next cycle. And so long as new contestants have material capacities that support other components of the brand, the assemblage as a whole is not threatened but may rather be further territorialized. Thus, the loss of a component need not necessarily deterritorialize a brand's identity. However, when fans exercise their expressive capacities and interpret some component of the serial brand that is departing the assemblage as having had a capacity that is not possessed in equal measure by replacements, they can catalyze destabilization of the brands' identity, including dissipation of its audience.

To illustrate, consider the case of fan reaction to the firing of certain judges, such as former supermodel Janice Dickinson who "made past seasons so damn addictive" (tagline for TWoP ANTM "Past Season" forum). The following quote is from a fan rewatching Cycle 3, which featured Dickinson:

> A Cycle 3 marathon was on Saturday, and I realized exactly how useful Janice actually was. I came in on the episode where she did a really good lesson on posing in different outfits. She actually took the time to work with [the contestants] individually, and told them some really helpful things. I'm sure this took several hours and we got a 5 or 10 minute montage of it, but she really drove home the whole "how not to pose in a swimsuit" bit. Admittedly, she was pretty damn vicious to Kelle for her entire run, especially the beauty shot critique. . . . However, I think at the end of the day, there were multiple interpretations to what Janice was saying during her meaner moments. (Domina Noctura, TWoP, May 25, 2009)

This post highlights both the ways Dickinson was framed as supporting the narratives treasured by fans and that her departure from the brand assemblage is being interpreted as a diminution in the capacities of the brand as a whole, given the implied message that replacement judges do not match her "usefulness." Fans had similar reactions when the three cast members mentioned in the opening vignette of this article (Nigel Barker, J. Alexander, and Jay Manuel) were let go. The next posts serve as illustration of the common reaction on discussion forums and blogs:

> *Reply: America's Next Top Model Fires Nigel Barker, J. Alexander, and Jay Manuel*
>
> I have to say, when I read this, my jaw dropped. This has got to be a sign of the end. . . . I don't know what the hell Tyra is thinking. (Critical, Moderator, *FORT*, April 20, 2012)
>
> Loyal America's Next Top Model fans might have a hard time processing this news: Tyra Banks has fired Nigel Barker, J. Alexander, and Jay Manuel. All three cast members have been staples of the show since the series premiere in 2003: Nigel Barker sat with Tyra on judges panel, looked dreamy; Jay Manuel directed all the photoshoots, was in turns exasperated and inspired, but consistently orange; J. Alexander taught eighteen seasons worth of contestants how to walk the runway, was sassy. I've tried and tried to imagine ANTM without Nigel and the Jays, and I can no sooner see a world in which Tyra Banks herself takes leave of the longtime modeling competition. . . . The changes will take effect next season, which will be the show's nineteenth. *The New York Post* reports that Tyra & co. are planning to better integrate social media with the series, and have already reached out to prominent blogger and man-about-Intertown Bryanboy. "Cool." (Nika Mavrodi, *The Fashion Spot*, April 20, 2012)

This last remark is made tongue in cheek: Nika Mavrodi does not view the fashion blogger Bryanboy in particular, or social media in general, as likely to be able to contribute to the ANTM brand in the same way as had the discarded cast members. She "cannot imagine" ANTM without them any more than she can see the brand surviving if Tyra Banks herself were to depart.

Fan interpretations of old judges relative to new ones do not inevitably favor the departing cast members. Indeed fans considered J. Alexander a successful substitute when he took over a role previously played by others (Beau Qillian, Cycle 1; Eric Nicholson, Cycle 2; Nole Marin, Cycles 3–4). However, fans chose to interpret the ejection of Barker, Manuel, and Alexander as having weakened the brand, construing their replacements as having little or no capacity to support and reinforce the key narratives of the show. The following post illustrates this kind of interpretation:

> The Jays and Nigel are not the problem with ANTM, so I'm

> pretty flabbergasted that Tyra fired them (but is keeping that wet blanket Kelly [Cutrone, fashion publicist]. . . . Um WTF?! Bring back the boys, Andre [Leon Talley, former *Vogue* contributing editor] and Janice, please and thank you)!!! . . . Top Model used to be really focused on making the girls into viable, employable models. Now it's focused on making them into celebrities. Newsflash: we have enough vapid "celebs" running around . . . Put the MODELING back into Top Model!!! (Tiffany Gonzalez, ANTM's Facebook page, April 20, 2012)

> Losing one of these guys would really hurt the show; all three gone at one time pretty much eviscerates it. And even worse, I guess the way things have been going with guest judges recently, we can expect Nigel, Ms. J and Jay Manuel to be replaced by Spencer Pratt, Heidi Montag and whichever Kardashian works cheapest. . . . It's really a shame The CW just announced the show got renewed, right before this news. I'm more convinced than ever that they should've pulled the plug after C16, and not let Tyra try this ridiculous revamp of the show. (SurrnderDorothy, FORT, April 20, 2012)

In these posts, fans predict that replacement components will inevitably lack the capacity to support the high fashion narrative, framing new judges as a "ridiculous revamp" and suggesting it would be better if the show ended than if it continued its ever-less-coherent path.

Lest it seem that the actual capacities of exiting and entering components are irrelevant to the process in which fans engage, we stress that, as DeLanda argues (2006, 11), capacities do depend on properties of components of assemblages. In other words, replacement components may well have different capacities than exiting ones. And it may well be the case that the new components introduced to the ANTM assemblage (such as judge Kelly Cutrone, a fashion publicist) may have fewer material or expressive capacities to complement core narratives of the brand when compared with elements that exited (such as Janice Dickenson, the one-time supermodel). Likewise, new brand components may have capacities that are superior to some that have exited. As has been argued in the case of revived or retro brands, older components of assemblages can be replaced with newer ones in a way that makes the brand more appealing to consumers (Brown et al. 2003). The key notion we are stressing here is that fan interpretations can help to fuel brand destabilization when they interpret a departing component as having reinforced the identity of the brand and when they use their expressive capacities to convey that a replacement for that component is less replete with such capacities.

Having articulated the three analytically distinct but practically intertwined elements of the process in which fans can be engaged, we conclude our analysis by highlighting the critical roles played by two intersecting brand assemblages, discussion boards and the media. Boards such as FORT and TWoP afford fans a platform on which they can convey what they are paying attention to, collate heterogeneity-amplifying artifacts, and exercise their expressive capacities in the service of highlighting the diminished capacities of the brand assemblages they are attending to. The media, when it gives coverage to the actions of fans, serves to broadcast them to a wider swath of the public, including audience members who may not be active on fan forums. Without these two intersecting assemblages, fans would have less ability to reach those audience members who are not as engaged with the brand and who simply have less time to pay attention to dynamics within it.

The importance of intersecting assemblages can be illustrated through a discussion of the dynamics that ensued in 2008 when the ANTM forum on FORT was suddenly shut down. From the show's inception, the forum had been a gathering place of choice for ANTM fans to engage in multiple cherished practices, from gossiping about judges and contestants to exhibiting fan art. Shortly after Cycle 10's season finale, the entire forum was suddenly locked down, as reported by a blogger devoted to the archiving of modeling material performed by former ANTM contestants:

> You have GOT to be kidding me. The following is a message left by "John," one of the administrators over at Fans of Reality TV (aka FORT): "Attention everyone: After serious thought and discussion, we have decided that we will no longer be covering ANTM, and we will therefore be closing the forum to new posts, permanently." (America's Next Top Blogger, May 29, 2008)

The abrupt termination of the forum triggered dismay, as indicated in the following post taken from FORT's FAQ:

> Very important question . . .When is the ANTM forum back???? . . . It's such a shame, the forum was one of, if not . . . the best ANTM one on the world wide web! I've tried others but none have come up to the standard. The arts and interest was so big. . . . I think it was a really bad decision. I really hope it reopens sometime before C11!! I'm sure FORT has lost many members because of it. (antmluva1234, *FORT*, July 22, 2008)

Three years later, as Cycle 16 started, the forum reopened with as little notice as it had closed. However, by the time it reopened, few fans returned. For example, the most popular thread, as of Spring 2014, was "ANTM All Stars" (Cycle 17), which had generated about 261 posts since its creation in September 2011. In comparison, in Spring 2008, when the forum was shut down, the most popular thread, "ANTM Avatars," created in March 2005, had more than 14,000 posts. And while a potential explanation for FORT's inability to regain its previous levels of activity could be that fans simply reconvened in other online venues, our observations of the declining online activity over time does not support this possibility. Across the various boards, fan participation has reached an all-time low. The discontinuities caused by the shut-down (temporary or permanent) of threads in popular intersecting discussion board assemblages contributes to destabilizing the ANTM assemblage, as fans relied upon its material capacities to keep abreast of the show and to interact with other fans. While such platforms

also support the generation and dissemination of heterogeneity amplifying artifacts, without them fans have less collective capacity to digest new changes to the show and to interpret moves on the part of producers that might have helped reterritorialize the brand.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Canniford and Shankar (2013, 1053) note that theories of assemblage provide a "framework to consider how value emerges from networked associations established between diverse kinds of consumption resources." In our work, which examines a serial brand as an assemblage of components with both material and expressive capacities, we use the same theoretical perspective to explore the erosion of value within a network as the associational linkages within that assemblage fray over time and assemblage "betrayal" escalates. Whereas Canniford and Shankar (2013) highlight consumers' efforts to mend betrayals and restore the coherence of assemblages, our work illuminates how consumers can play the opposite role as well. In the context of a serial brand assemblage, consumers exercising their material and expressive capacities can highlight and amplify the incoherence of the assemblage components, fueling the devaluation of the assemblage as a whole and the dissipation of its audience. It also complements three of the main existing explanations that have, until now, been available to account for consumers' defection from brands they once enjoyed. We elaborate below.

Assemblage versus Satiation, Psychological, and Semiotic Perspectives on Brands

Our assemblage theoretic perspective provides a useful complement to satiation-based arguments explaining the dissipation of audiences for serial brands: rather than positing that consumers become satiated with brand features that are too invariant over time, our work suggests that attentive consumers find diminished value in assemblages once they start to interpret their components as having diminished coherence, a process that escalates when such consumers start to generate artifacts that increase the heterogeneity of the assemblage and to interpret producers' replacements of exiting elements as lacking critical capacities. Unlike the satiation perspective, our works sheds light on the success of long-running serial brands, such as nightly news shows or late-night talk shows. While these shows do evolve over time (e.g., by introducing new hosts), the components added or substituted have capacities such that attentive audience members can categorize them as complementing those already in the assemblage and as helping to reinforce its identity. When serial brands are "refreshed" by the enrollment of components with complementary capacities, engaged consumers have fewer bases on which to generate material artifacts that increase assemblage heterogeneity or to offer interpretations of replacement elements as inferior to original ones, and they may instead be more likely to add value to the brand in the ways suggested by Schau et al. (2009).

To an extent, the assemblage theoretic perspective we offer bears a resemblance to certain psychology-based perspectives on consumers' reactions to branding initiatives that diminish the cognitive "fit" between salient brand characteristics. Such accounts have been used, for example, to explain why consumers' perceptions of luxury brands that normally trigger self-enhancement brand concepts are threatened when such brands launch corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives that trigger self-transcendence concepts (Torelli, Monga, and Kaikati 2012): a self-enhancement concept, when paired with a self-discrepancy concept, triggers spontaneous, nonconscious conflicting motivations and goals, resulting in subjective experiences of disfluency. Similar rationales are used to explain why consumers react unfavorably to brand extensions that exhibit product feature dissimilarity or brand concept inconsistency (Park, Milberg, and Lawson 1991).

While inconsistency is a concept shared between psychological perspectives and our assemblage theoretic perspective, a key difference in the account we offer is the active role of consumers in generating perceived inconsistency in the brand assemblage and in elaborating upon it. Both psychological and assemblage theoretic accounts would agree that producers may err by introducing elements to a brand that conflict with those previously enjoyed by its consumers. Ours, unlike a purely psychological account, focuses attention on how consumers interacting with one another can not only influence and escalate each other's perceptions that a new element is discordant but also actively import new information from intersecting assemblages and create new artifacts, both of which will heighten the potential for perceived discrepancy and the availability of that interpretation for a wider audience of consumers. Thus, while psychological accounts are useful for understanding individual consumer reactions to innovations within a brand assemblage, our assemblage theoretic account brings added value by highlighting both consumers' agency in escalating brand inconsistencies and the type of inter-consumer sociological process that can have catalytic consequences for wide-scale audience dissipation. These sociological processes cannot be reduced to something as simple as negative word of mouth. Avid fans who engaged in reframing, remixing, and rejecting may well be trying to attract the attention of, and help correct perceived missteps made by, managers of a brand they have greatly enjoyed. Yet, they may alter the assemblage in ways that accelerate the defection of other audience members and trigger other catalytic processes that lead to the brand's demise.

Our perspective also complements prior semiotic research on branding that has focused on narratives, images, myths, and stories to such an extent that the material capacities of components of brands have sometimes been obscured from view. Entwistle and Slater (2012, 23) recently criticized the ways marketing scholars conceptualize brands as a "largely semiotic construction, signs that derive their meanings within language-like codes, that secure much of their power from their articulation with deeper and more pervasive se-

miotic structures (myths, ideologies, etc.) [without adequately considering] the broad range of relations, the huge assemblage of practices, through which relations between goods and signs are established, stabilized and exploited." It can be argued that under the semiotic view, brands are conceptualized in purely expressive terms, separate and distinct from the material elements that make up the associated product offering. Our assemblage theoretic view, by contrast, insists that brands cannot be understood without viewing them as comprising both the narratives that marketers harness *and* the myriad components with important material capacities that make up the product itself, as well as the consumers who contribute at times to stabilizing and at other times to destabilizing the assemblage.

Compared with the semiotic view, our perspective on branding broadens our understanding of brand vulnerabilities. Whereas semiotic perspectives highlight that brands may suffer when their narratives no longer seem authentic (Thompson et al. 2006) or when they fail to address acute cultural contradictions (Holt 2004), assemblage theoretic perspectives show that vulnerabilities may arise when material capacities in intersecting assemblages deteriorate or when attentive consumers start to introduce heterogeneity into the assemblage by exercising both their material and expressive capacities.

To illustrate the added value of our analysis relative to that of semiotic conceptualizations of brands, we compare how our perspective versus the cultural resonance model developed by Holt (2004) might explain the dissipation of ANTM's audience. Holt argues that successful brands, or at least "iconic" brands, are those whose identifying narratives (1) address acute contradictions in society, (2) provide extraordinary value because they address the collective anxieties and desires of a nation by embodying identity myths set in populist worlds separated from everyday life and from realms of commerce and elite control, and thereby (3) perform as activists, leading culture and encouraging people to think differently about themselves. Holt stresses that iconic brands cannot tell one consistent story over time but rather must update their narratives to achieve historical fit.

Our analysis does not contradict Holt's (2004) argument that brands can attain and sustain a following by achieving resonance or "fit" within the larger historical assemblages in which they are embedded; however, it also draws attention to the multiple other assemblages with which a brand intersects (e.g., discussion boards, media, TV networks) and to the idea that intersections with some of these assemblages may be critical to how brands evolve those narratives. For example, Giesler's (2012) study of the challenges that the Botox brand faced demonstrates an instance in which successfully updating a brand's narrative depended on managing the intersections between the Botox brand assemblage and the media assemblage.

Our analysis also suggests that when brands add narratives to create greater cultural resonance, they are more likely to be successful if the new narratives can readily be construed by audience members as having capacities that complement those of components already present in the brand assemblage. Not all brands that attempt to achieve cultural resonance are successful in doing so, and one reason they fail in this attempt is likely that some new narratives are prone to being framed by audiences as discordant with preexisting components. If we consider ANTM in this regard, we might argue that by allowing the persona-branding narrative to be imported into the brand assemblage, executives may have been trying to embody popular identity myths, address collective anxieties and desires, and encourage people to think differently about themselves, much in the manner Holt (2004) advocates. However, the tensions fans perceived between the new narrative and the preexisting components in the ANTM brand assemblage (in particular the high fashion narrative) appear to have prevented this particular execution of a cultural branding strategy from having the desired impact.

Our perspective also highlights that managing brands entails more than managing elements with largely expressive capacities, such as narratives. It entails managing elements with material capacities—such as contestants or judges—that can either support or undermine the expressive capacities of narratives. Thus, even though the narrative of high fashion may have had continuing cultural resonance, the introduction of petite contestants and of judges without industry credentials disabled the capacity of the high fashion narrative to sustain the brand.

To reiterate, an assemblage theoretic perspective offers insights on audience dissipation that satiation, psychological, and semiotic perspectives collectively have not identified. Viewing brands as assemblages allows consideration of dynamics within the brand itself that are not initiated by the brand manager and that can impact the brand in ways not envisioned, and sometimes not welcomed, by either consumers or managers. In the brand context, an assemblage theoretic perspective thus highlights that brand destabilization is an ever-present possibility, yet not an inevitable process inherent in brand maturation. It can also complement our understanding of other brand-related concepts that have been developed to account for dynamics within brand audience, such as doppelgänger brand images and brand co-creation, or, in our case, brand co-destruction. We now elaborate.

Extending Accounts of Doppelgänger Brand Images and Brand Co-creation

The notion of doppelgänger brand images was introduced by Thompson et al. (2006). They used it to explain why emotional brands (brands rich with emotionally resonant meanings that have high identity value for consumers) sometimes encounter a backlash entailing the generation and circulation of a family of disparaging images by former consumers, anti-brand activists, and the media. Their thesis was that such images arise when the authenticity of an emotional

branding story "becomes suspect" and the identity value of the brand is greatly reduced (Thompson et al. 2006, 53).

We believe that our analysis of ANTM's brand dynamics can help to extend our understanding of this phenomenon by examining how negative images emerge in the case of a serial brand that is distinguished more by its episodic and epistemic qualities than by its emotional ones. Comparisons can be made in terms of where the images originate, why they are generated, and how widely they spread in popular culture. As described by Thompson et al. (2006), in the case of Starbucks, negative images were generated in intersecting assemblages (by consumers of brands other than Starbucks, by anti-brand activists, or by opinion leaders in the media) and were generated because proponents wanted to draw attention to the inauthenticity of the brand's positioning. There is little to suggest, in the case of Starbucks, that consumers who were avid patrons contributed much to the generation of negative brand imagery. Rather, those who derived value from distancing themselves from the brand took the lead in circulating the negative imagery widely through popular culture.

By contrast, in the case of ANTM, negative images are generated within the brand's own assemblage by attentive current consumers who are making sense of changes to the assemblage. The episodic nature of the brand particularly invites renewed scrutiny from active audience members when each new season commences. The negative imagery that attentive fans generate seems more a response to their perception that the entertainingly epistemic value of the brand is diminished by the incoherence of its components than by a concern for any loss in its cultural resonance or its value to them as an identity marker. Indeed, it often appears that fans who generate negative images of the brand through the text or pictures they create might hope the shows' producers will take note and remedy the escalating deterritorialization of the brand. While media that report on the entertainment industry do note and circulate the negative images, thus increasing the chances of them being exposed to a broader audience not active on, for example, discussion boards, the negative imagery for a serial brand such as ANTM does not seem to become a staple of popular culture to the same extent as do doppelgänger images of emotional brands like Starbucks or Botox (Geisler 2012). Plausibly, serial brands, given their epistemic nature, are more complicated than emotional brands and provide less ready fodder for cultural parody since those unfamiliar with the brand cannot immediately appreciate ironies pointed out by clever critics. Our insights here are tentative, as an analysis of doppelgänger images was not the main focus of our investigation. However, our analysis highlights the need for more work to explore the nature and dynamics of negative brand imagery in brands with contrasting characteristics.

Our work also highlights that while fans can be conducive to value creation or co-creation, they can equally contribute to value co-destruction. Here again we acknowledge that fans' motives in calling into question the capacities of new or replacement components of brands, and in creating unflattering material that increases brand heterogeneity, may not be to destabilize the brand. Regardless of their intent however, fans paying close attention to brand dynamics and categorizing new elements as contradictory, or replacement elements as lacking key capacities of originals, can leave a material legacy that influences the perspectives and behaviors of less deeply engaged audience members either directly or indirectly. It is important to note here that our work draws attention to a process that is sparked by fans' reactions to components that producers purposely or inadvertently introduce into their brands. Their value-destroying activities would be much less likely to occur if brand managers were adding new or replacement components that complemented those extant in the assemblage rather than those that do not.

Taken as a whole, our work suggests that if researchers are to expand our understanding of how audiences for serial brands in particular (and, perhaps, for other kinds of brands) are sustained after a brand has achieved a measure of success, they must examine the components of brands not only with expressive capacities but also with material capacities. To analyze a focal brand of interest, they may also need to attend to the dynamics in one or more intersecting brand assemblages that can contribute to the stabilization or destabilization of the focal brand. We also hope that our work, which relied on the analysis of a single serial brand, stimulates additional research that will allow us to compare and contrast the process we identify for this brand with others. We refrain from assuming that the same kinds of theoretical dynamics we identify are applicable to audiences for less serial brands, but we believe that studies that examine the processes of decline in the assemblages of other types of brands are urgently needed.

DATA COLLECTION INFORMATION

The first author conducted all of the offline (Toronto 2007, 2009, Montréal 2007, and New York City 2007) and online fieldwork from Spring 2007 until Summer 2013. The second author acted as confidante throughout the process. Data were discussed and analyzed on multiple occasions by both authors using the first author's field notes, interview data, pictures and videos, e-mails, online screen captures, and text files.

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CORRECTIONS.—Since this article was published online on October 14, 2014, a correction to a sentence in the last paragraph of the "Context" subsection of the Method" section has been made. The revised sentence reads: "*Duck Dynasty*, for example, drew 11.8 million viewers in 2013, eclipsing the viewership total of any other reality show in history (Cohen 2013)." Added was the word *Duck* in front of the word *Dynasty*.