



# Creating a compelling brand meaning by orchestrating stories: The case of Scandinavia's largest department store



Daniel Hjelmgren

University of Borås, S-501 90 Borås, Sweden

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 18 September 2015

Received in revised form

23 June 2016

Accepted 25 June 2016

### Keywords:

Branding  
Orchestrating  
Humanizing  
Story telling

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to explore how a company can create a compelling brand meaning by orchestrating what is said in different points of contact with the brand. A case study of Scandinavia's largest store suggests that, in order to create a compelling brand meaning, a retailer need to manage oral and written stories, as well as stories told by facilities, goods, and services. It is argued that all stories need to be coherent in the sense that they all fit the brand meaning, and that it sometimes may require expansion of the retailer's control boundary. The case study also suggests that reality shows can be important points of contact, very much due to their ability to tell credible stories that can humanize the brand, and that individual employees can constitute important assets in these stories.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

A brand is a collection of associations or feelings regarding a certain product or service, as stored in people's minds (Adamson et al., 2006). When people know enough about a brand, they assign the brand a mental "file name" and put it on their "desktop". The more one know about the brand, the bigger this mental file (Adamson et al., 2006). However, to make a brand worth "saving", there needs to be a different meaning for the brand vis-à-vis other brands. Since the 1970s, many leading scholars have advocated different versions of the mind-share model (cf. Ries and Trout, 1981; Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1998). The mind-share model first took flight when Al Ries and Jack Trout published their book *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind* (Ries and Trout, 1981). Their argument was simple: For a brand to succeed in a society, where information about different offerings far exceeds what consumers can handle, a brand must occupy a distinctive place in people's minds. This is accomplished by simple and focused messages emphasizing strong, favorable, and unique brand associations that clearly distinguish a brand from its competition (Aaker, 1996).

Over the past decade, emotional branding has become a highly influential perspective (Bagozzi et al., 1999; Gobe, 2001; Zaltman, 2003), adopted by many well-known brands, including Lexus, Apple, McDonald's, Nike, and Starbucks (Gobe, 2001; Atkin, 2004; Roberts, 2004). The emotional branding perspective suggests that companies should concentrate on forging strong and meaningful emotional bonds (Thompson et al., 2006). According to

Akgun et al. (2013), emotional branding is crucial for firms in breaking the clutter through claiming distinctive associations in today's highly saturated environment where products and services are distinguished from each other by benefit based differentiations. Emotional bonds, for example, can be created by humanizing the brand and match its personality with the consumer's self (Malar et al., 2011), or by creating strong hedonic associations to the brand (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Orth et al., 2010).

Some research has focused on the role of storytelling in the creation of brand meanings (cf. Holt, 2004; Woodside, 2010; Chiu et al., 2012). According to Holt (2004), the challenge is to develop a brand meaning with which people can create a long lasting emotional bond. Furthermore, if you want to make sure that a certain story is told, you will need to build your entire organization around delivering this story (Godin, 2009). This may be difficult when customers have many different points of contact with the brand, e.g. a retailer. The aim of this paper is to investigate how a company can create a compelling brand meaning by orchestrating what is said in different points of contact with the brand.

The paper is structured as follows. First, a short review of prior research into storytelling is presented. Second, to facilitate analysis of how different points of contact contribute toward the creation of brand meaning, some prior research into customer experience creation is also presented. The literature review is followed by a description of the research design. Thereafter, a narrative on how Scandinavia's largest store tells different stories in various points of contact is presented. The narrative is structured according to different points of contacts revealed in the review of customer experience creation. Finally, some conclusions are drawn about what can be learned.

E-mail address: [daniel.hjelmgren@hb.se](mailto:daniel.hjelmgren@hb.se)

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. Storytelling

Sole and Gray Wilson (1999:6) define storytelling as the “sharing of knowledge and experiences through narrative and anecdotes in order to communicate lessons, complex ideas, concepts, and causal connections”. Levit (2009) argues that stories are effective with regard to individuals’ memory because people remember events in story form. In corporate branding, storytelling is often a means of distinguishing the corporate brand (Janssen et al., 2012), informing current and potential customers what the company is about (Jensen, 1999), and helping the company to bond with its customers (Roper and Fill, 2012). Important media include press releases, websites, intranets, speeches, annual reports (Roper and Fill, 2012), and blogs (Hsiao et al., 2013; Crotts 1999).

Gabriel (2000) claims that many corporate stories involve heroes and villains. However, since those stories are less likely to be true, they are seldom trusted by audiences (Gabriel, 2000). According to Heugens (2002), corporate stories communicated as a part of corporate branding should be based on truth, otherwise the story will fail to gain credibility. In other words, stories must tell us about real people, and describe real events and actions (Wilkins, 1984). Chiu et al. (2012) argue that, when customers perceive authenticity, they may feel more connected with, and touched by, the story. Moreover, different elements of a corporate story need to fit together. If the elements of a corporate story do not fit together, people may contest the story and ignore it (Dowling, 2006).

Although storytelling is often defined as the “sharing of knowledge and experiences through narratives and anecdotes” (see Sole and Gray Wilson, 1999), it is certainly not the only way of telling stories. When you slam the door of a Mercedes, the characteristic noise it makes tells a story about solidity and workmanship, and indirectly also a story about safety and performance. When you buy an iPhone, you get it in a box in which you usually find a piece of jewelry, telling you that you have bought something extraordinary. This story is further enforced by the Apple stores, which are uncluttered, clean and white in design, much like Apple’s product packaging. According to Godin (2009), all the pieces need to tell a coherent story, because otherwise the story will become contradictory and confusing, and people will ignore it. For example, if your sign is cool and your location is cool, but your people and products are not, then you are not telling a coherent story (Godin, 2009). Since a store involves a large number of tangible and intangible elements which can tell stories, we need a holistic approach when analyzing how that store can create a compelling brand meaning by telling stories. Thus, the next section is a review of some prior academic work on customer experience creation. Inspired by this work, the last three sections of this paper concern how a retailer can orchestrate the stories being told in its customers’ different points of contact with the brand. However, instead of how different experiences contribute to customers’ perceived value and satisfaction, this paper will deal with how different stories support the creation of a certain brand meaning.

### 2.2. Customer experience creation

In the late 1990s, Pine and Gilmore (1999) introduced the concept of “Customer Experience”. They argued that “experiences” are the next stage of what they call the progression of economic value - after commodities, goods and services. Gentile et al. (2007) claim that, using a customer experience approach, consumption is viewed as a holistic experience whereby consumers interact with a company, or its offering, in several different ways and levels. Each interaction evokes value by either helping the customer to

successfully accomplish an intended goal or by providing enjoyment and fun (Bäckström and Johansson, 2006). Thus, it can either satisfy utilitarian need or give hedonistic pleasure. While utilitarian motives for shopping involve low prices, quality, and convenience (Genuens et al., 2002), hedonistic motives are adventure, gratification, role, value, social, and idea shopping motivations (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003). Adventure shopping occurs when consumers shop for stimulation, adventure, and the feeling of being in their own world. Gratification shopping occurs when consumers shop to relieve stress, lighten a negative mood, and forget about their current problems. Role shopping is when consumers get enjoyment from shopping for others, rather than for themselves. Value shopping happens when consumers assume shopping as bargain hunting. Social shopping occurs when consumers get enjoyment from shopping with family and friends, and view shopping as a social activity involving other consumers or shop workers. Finally, idea shopping happens when consumers shop to keep up with the latest fashion trends.

Pullman and Gross (2004) argue that context is the main concern for experience management. They propose two primary components of context: *Physical* and *relational*. Bäckström and Johansson (2006) separate the physical context into two dimensions: *Atmospherics* and *design*. According to Kotler (1973), atmospherics is the factor in the in-store environment that can be designed in order to elicit certain emotional responses in the consumer. For example, music (Yalch and Spangenberg, 1990), scents (Spangenberg et al., 1996), lighting (Baker and Cameron, 1996), and colors (Bellizzi and Hite, 1992). While atmospherics is usually used to describe the rather intangible aspects of the in-store environment, store design is commonly applied in order to signify the more tangible elements. This, for example, has to do with the overall style that is expressed by the store’s interior architecture (Bäckström and Johansson, 2006), store decorations (Hoffman and Turley, 2002), and the design of food and beverages, and their presentation (Hanefors and Mossberg, 2003). Relational context involves “humanic clues” from behaviors generated by people, and can be separated in terms of being (1) between the guest and the service provider and (2) between the guest and the other guests (Carbone and Haeckel, 1994).

Berry et al. (2002) suggest that, in order for companies to compete by providing their customers with a satisfactory experience, they have to orchestrate all the “clues” that people detect during the buying process. Baker et al. (2002) present a model that considers the effects of several factors, e.g. price and range. Other literature on the retail experience has focused on store atmospherics and the impact of scents, music, and color (cf. Naylor et al., 2008). Verhoef et al. (2009) take one step further by moving beyond the elements under the control of the retailer. Their model of the antecedents to, and the moderators of, the customer experience includes the social environment, the service interface, the retail atmosphere, the assortment, the price, and the promotions. While the social environment concerns interactions with other customers, the service interface concerns interactions with store employees.

## 3. Methodological considerations

The study is exploratory in nature and based on a single case study of how a large store – Gekås – is orchestrating stories it provides to its customers in various points of contact with the brand. Single case studies usually include a number of various applicable methodologies that complement one another (Yin, 2003). In this study, a combination of interviews, observations, and documents studied is used. The purpose of using different sources of data is not so much to get a more accurate,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7433822>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7433822>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)