

“Brands are People, Too!”

The Role of Brand Identity, Narrative and Personality in Modern Marketing

by

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ABSTRACT

Though marketing researchers have long postulated the importance of a brand's personality to its overall value, nobody has attempted to define the process behind how brand personality is established. This paper postulates the supreme importance and of brand narratives, both its internal (it's history and collective makeup) and external (the perceptions which consumers come to have, predicated on the brand's demonstrative efforts to persuade), in the building of a positive and beneficial brand narrative. The present work details a multitude of variables which go into constructing a narrative that successfully connotes the desired personality, and concludes by applying the framework to the BlackBerry brand, a well-known but beleaguered brand facing a multitude of problems.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Marketers have and always will be interested in the persuasion of individuals towards economically-favorable outcomes; the goal of advertising is ultimately to convince an individual to spend money (Randazzo, 2006). To this end, advertisers regularly make use of the many theories and practices postulated by prominent social psychologists (Lahlou, 2009). Social Psychology has examined a number of topics advertisers would find pertinent to marketing, including persuasion (Cialdini, 2006), attitude change/manipulation (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), and commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Many of the empirical findings reported in the literature have been appropriated towards advertising in some facet (Belk, 2010; Butnaru, 2009).

Social psychologists have long asserted the robust power of the situation over behavior (Haney & Zimbardo, 1998). Particular circumstances predispose people of different backgrounds towards similar or uniform social and behavioral outcomes (Haney & Zimbardo, 1998; Seeman, 1997). The situation alone, however, is not the only variable in play. People enter situations as autonomous agents, shaped by their genetics, biological processes, and the neurological and cognitive predispositions formed by the events of one's past (Ajzen, 2005). An individual's *personality*, defined as an person's inimitable permutation of characteristic traits, cognitive adaptations and integrative life stories (McAdams & Pals, 2006), regulates the decisions and behavior that individual elicits.

1.1: Identity as a Social Instrument

A person's identity, or self, is the summation of a person's attitudes, evaluations of one's self, feelings, and perceptions (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Kantor, 2011). Individuals seem to be inherently concerned with the presentation of self-identity to those around them (Goffman,

1959). Sharing memories which a person conceives of as explanatory of his/her identity is one of the many outlets of expression (Schiffrin, 1996). A *narrative*, defined as “any cohesive and coherent story with an identifiable beginning, middle and end that provides information about scene, characters and conflict; raises unanswered questions or unresolved conflict; and provides resolution” (Hinyard & Kreuter, 2007), is a social tool used to express one’s identity to society, with the secondary purpose of manipulating external perceptions of the core self towards a favorable outcome (people liking you) (Hirschman, 2010).

The use of linguistic expression, whether vocal or written, is not the sole way in which narratives are presented. External identity expression is aided by public commitment towards number of explicit social activities, which include (but are not limited to) the commitment to social roles, the affiliation with specific social groups, and the elicitation of relevant behaviors and actions (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Individuals use these roles as *social props*, actions or social roles which symbolically represent personal values and/or associations (Gabler, 1998; Goffman, 1959; Hirschman, 2010). A politician whom describes himself as “a successful businessman” may do so to gain association with the values and traits associated with that role, namely, an aptitude in management and overall success.

These iconic actions become symbolic of personality characteristics and are themselves folded into the identity of the individual performing them over time (Belk, 1988). Though a person might join a group for one reason, over time belongingness to that group becomes part of one’s narrative as well. Say, for example, you develop an interest in football and become a fan of the New York Giants. You might do so because your friends are all Giants fans (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998), or because you self-report as a sports fan and as a New Yorker, or simply to bask in their reflective glory of the most recent Super Bowl Championship team (Cialdini et

al., 1976). To support this affiliation, you engage in actions indicative of a group member; you watch the games, keep up on the team's news, converse with friends about the team's recent shortcomings or successes, and perhaps even go to a game or two. Over time, the reasons for doing so become irrelevant, and group affiliation is folded into one's narrative; "I watch the Giants because I want to be closer to my friends" evolves into "I am a Giants fan".

1.2: Use of Possessions as Symbolic Identity Indicators

The usage of symbolic props extends far past the use of social roles and activities. Consumers similarly utilize *possessions* which have come to represent coherent positive, pro-social qualities consistent with their expressed identity (Ahuvia, 2005; Belk, 1988; Escalas & Bettman, 2003, 2003; Huang, Mitchell, & Rosenaum-Elliott, 2012; Schembri, Merrilees, & Kristiansen, 2010). A person's possessions are, in the eyes of the consumer, a reflection of that individual's preferences, values, and personality, of what he/she finds important (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998) and aid in the reinforcement and expression of one's identity (Biel, 1993).

The symbolic meaning of any possession has a number of sources. A belonging, for example, may represent greater meaning via its association with relevant history (a family heirloom), or innate functionality (a great shampoo, which has changed the way your hair looks, thereby representing beauty and youth). The earlier aspiring football fan, for example, may place high value upon the Giants hoodie or jersey he purchased at a game. The item itself may be of little worth, but it is symbolically representative of a desired group membership present in a person's ever-evolving narrative identity. Eventually, the item itself may garner importance beyond its symbolism and can itself become a piece of that person's overall identity (Belk, 1988).

1.3: Brands – Definition and Use in Consumer’s Identity Development

The item’s brand (ex: Apple, Nike, GM, P&G) also carries with it a set of connotations which affect the branded possession symbolic meaning (Huang et al., 2012; Kantor, 2011; Randazzo, 2006). A brand, defined by the American Marketing Association as “*a name, term design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers*” (Bennett & American Marketing Association, 1995; Dahlén, Lange, & Smith, 2010; Kotler & Keller, 2008), does not itself provide any tangible benefit to the physical product. Brands give buyers a method of quick differentiation, so that they may decide between products produced by different companies (Hirschman, 2010).

A consumer that has a positive experience with a product labeled by a specific brand will associate goods labeled of that marque with the original positive experience (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). He/she is more likely to repurchase both the original ware and any others labeled with that brand (Hirschman, 2010). Additionally, as an individual becomes more exposed to a brand, it becomes more likely that he/she will purchase a product made by them in the future (Baker, 1999; Ferraro, Bettman, & Chartrand, 2009).

Consumers perceive brands as having personality traits (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). Over time, brands become symbolically representative of a host of different emotions, values, biases, dispositions, schemas, opinions, and above all else, an overarching narrative (J. L. Aaker, 1997; Randazzo, 2006). These traits are by and large symptomatic of characteristics usually used to describe human personality, which are re-appropriated by the consumer to refer to the brands themselves, resulting in a personified *brand personality* (J. L. Aaker, 1997). Once a brand becomes personified, the brand itself become a useful social prop for personality affirmation,

identity refinement, and social demonstration of narrative identity (Belk, 1988; Biel, 1993; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Huang et al., 2012). Consumers use the symbolic meaning given to a brand as one of the many tools used to construct self-identity (Cooper, Schembri, & Miller, 2010).

Brands therefore possess a limited and entirely symbolic aspect of personhood derived from external perceptions of human qualities the brand is seemed to personify. Yet the existence of a brand is entirely intangible. Brands themselves are not human, they cannot think or feel outside of the actions of a managing entity (Fournier, 1998) and therefore cannot possess personality, yet we speak and think of them as individual actors in possession of a singular set of characteristics (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). The question then becomes, how is it possible that a non-human, entirely intangible entity could become synonymous with cognitive qualities descriptive of personality, qualities a nonhuman could not possible have?

1.4: Thesis Statement

This paper will provide an in-depth analysis of the origins and sources of a brand's personality. The paper will conclude that the *narrative identity* of the brand, or *brand identity*, is the source of the brand's persona. Consumers falsely attribute human personality characteristics to inanimate brands, as a function of the narratives they are presented with. By meticulously controlling the constellation of influences on brand narrative, companies can effectively control the personality that their brand is ascribed. This thesis will present the case of a well-known brand whose identity has devolved in recent years, and explain the process by which a beneficial narrative can be established.

Chapter 2: What is Brand Personality?

2.1: Introduction to Personality

Personality is a multifaceted cognitive structure, the aggregate of a constellation of variables which make up one's core character (John & Srivastava, 1999; McAdams, 1997a). Though the elements which constitute personality are unknowably vast, Personality Psychologists have begun to organize them under a single governing structure (McAdams et al., 2004). The McAdams' model postulates the existence of three separate levels of personality, each moderated by biological and socio-cultural influences. The first level embodies an individual's *dispositional traits*, a broad set of core characteristic differences which predispose the actions of an individual towards certain behavioral outcomes (McAdams & Pals, 2006; McAdams et al., 2004). The second level is made up of *characteristic adaptations*, which includes goals, ideals, drives, biases, et cetera. The third level examines *integrative life story*, a self-selected mosaic of important *self-defining memories* weaved together to form an all-encompassing narrative of a person's life (McAdams, 1997b). The integrative life story provides the individual with a sense of personal progress and of consistency throughout his or her life (McAdams & Pals, 2006). Self-defining memories are delineated by varying levels of emotionality, detail, plot-lines, themes, reflections upon personal values and anxieties, and varying degrees of personal accessibility (Blagov & Singer, 2004).

2.2: Comparing Brand and Human Personality

At its most basic definition, a *brand* is, as earlier described, a unit comprised of a name/logo/symbol (or some combination thereof) used to differentiate products of similar

function from one another (Kotler & Keller, 2008). *Brand personality* was first coined by Aaker (1997) in *Dimensions of Brand Personality*, an article which would launch a body of ever-expanding literature and research examining the concept. The most current and up-to-date definition, as postulated by Azoulay & Kapferer (2003), defines brand personality as “*the set of human personality traits that are both applicable to and relevant for brands*” (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Milas & Mlačić, 2007; Yoon, Gutches, Feinberg, & Polk, 2006).

Brands are seen by the average consumer as having dispositional traits (Level 1) (J. L. Aaker, 1997; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Guido, 2001; Huang et al., 2012), characteristic adaptations/value perceptions (Level 2) (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010; Paasovaara, Luomala, Pohjanheimo, & Sandell, 2012; Padgett & Allen, 1997), and an integrative life story (Level 3) (Escalas, 2004; Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010). The typical consumer conceives of a brand’s personality as possessing elements of all three of McAdams’ three-level model of personality, but there are a number of things to consider.

2.3: Level 1 – Dispositional Traits in Brand Personality

First, although brands are thought of as possessing the same personality traits as humans do, the trait measures of brand personality do not reliably assess the personality constructs of people (J. L. Aaker, 1997; Caprara et al., 2001). In his seminal work on brand personality, Aaker (1997) developed a 44-Item Trait Scale trait-taxonomy in order to measure conceptions of dispositional traits within brands. The literature, however, seems to have mixed feelings about it (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Geuens, Weijters, & De Wulf, 2009; Milas & Mlačić, 2007). It does not generalize to other cultures (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003), and it invariably measures human

characteristics *associated* with a brand, not a set of internal dispositional traits (Geuens et al., 2009).

A number of researchers have attempted to apply the Big-Five Inventory, widely regarded as the standard measurement of human dispositional traits (McCrae & Costa, 1987), towards the assessment of brand traits (Caprara et al., 2001; Geuens et al., 2009), with differing levels of success (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Huang et al., 2012). Though some studies do suggest that traits are worth greater observation and attention (Huang et al., 2012), right now there is no agreed-upon trait measure which can be reliably applied to both individuals and brands.

2.4: Level 2 – Characteristic Adaptations in Brand Personality

There seems to be significant overlap between the particular characteristic adaptations people accumulate (values, biases, opinions), and those which are attributed to brands (Paasovaara et al., 2012). Individuals think of brands as entities which stand for something, whom operate under a set of beliefs and goals (Solomon, 2007).

According to *self-congruity theory*, consumers opt in favor of products produced by brands whose values and opinions are equivalent to their own (Allen, Gupta, & Monnier, 2008; Kleine, Kleine, & Kernan, 1993), despite equality in the value and function of the goods themselves. Individuals perceive brands with similar values to their own as part of an in-group delineated by congruence in personal beliefs (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Paasovaara and her colleagues (2012) demonstrate this in a study observing the effects of value congruence between self and brand on the perceived taste of the associated product (in this case, a yogurt). They found that individuals whose values mirrored those associated with the brand reported an

enhanced taste experience as compared to the blind evaluation scores (Paasovaara et al., 2012). Similar studies have replicated the same results (Allen et al., 2008).

Characteristic adaptations *and* dispositional traits are both, by definition, the product of biological and cognitive processes that non-human entities cannot possess (McAdams & Pals, 2006). The complex interactions between genetic predispositions and sociocultural effects on of an individual (McCrae & Costa, 1987) produce what we perceive to be a trait, or a bias/value/opinion/etc. A brand, however, is itself no more than a name, a personified entity. It does not possess the cognitive structures to *be* extroverted, to *have* biases. The people who run the brand certainly do, but brands are referred to in the singular, as unified entities, not as a conglomerate of individual minds. When a new product is introduced to the market, it is reported as being released by the singular brand (“Today, *Microsoft* released...”), not by the people who actually produced it (“Today, a team of developers working for *Microsoft* released...”). Brands are *unable* to possess characteristic adaptations or dispositional traits in accordance to the definitions of each that were cited earlier.

Consumers artificially assign **traits** and **characteristic adaptations** to brands based only on their perceptions; brands lack the human qualities necessary to truly have them. Analysis based on levels 1 and 2 of McAdams’ three-pronged approach is not applicable to the study of brand personality, because a brand’s self-defining narrative, McAdams’ third and final level of personality, is the basis for its entire identity.

2.4: Level 3 – Brand Narrative

Brand narrative, like that of an individual, is the absolute summation of its past, present, and expectations for the future (Dahlén et al., 2010). The narrative is comprised of the events

which have brought the brand to its current point in time, the products it has given birth to, and the ideals and values it purports operates under (Dahlén et al., 2010; Schembri et al., 2010).

Personified attributions of traits and characteristic adaptations are based off interpretations of that brand's narrative; if a brand exerts behavior characteristic of a neurotic individual, the brand will be associated with that trait as a consequence of that account (Escalas, 2004). Meaning is therefore ascribed to brands as a function of the narratives that are associated with them (Escalas, 2004). Over time, these qualities become integrated into the collective narrative identity of the aforementioned brand.

Chapter 3: The Sources of a Brand Narrative

A brand's narrative is created via input from a multitude of different sources. The relevant literature has addressed this by dividing a brand's narrative identity into two separate concepts, *brand image* and *brand identity*, which together comprise the symbolic *meaning* the brand becomes synonymous with (Caprara et al., 2001; Cooper et al., 2010; Geuens et al., 2009). *Brand identity*, according to Kapferer (2008), is the narrative which the firm manufactures, the story presented by the corporation to its relevant consumers. *Brand image* refers to the narrative the consumer crafts in response to the identity which firms manufacture, and the actions which individuals and corporations related to that brand engage in (Caprara et al., 2001; Geuens et al., 2009).

The dichotomy between the buyer and seller, the internal and external brand narrative, speaks to a duality of narrative sources contributing to the overarching brand *meaning*; the embodiment of the interactive process between consumer and corporate management in the production of narrative identity (Cooper et al., 2010). Ultimately, brands and their companies are reliant on the purchasing power of consumers, and must shape their external narratives based on what they believe the consumer prefers (Dahlén et al., 2010). Brand narrative, however, is not solely the product of consumer desires. The collective narrative of any group or entity is also important; the interior constitution of an organization will impact the exterior perceptions people draw (Brown, 2006). It is this dichotomy, the pull and tug between the *internal brand narrative* (the internal story of a fledgling company striving towards success) and the *external brand narrative* (the extrinsic, expressed brand meaning that is meant to influence and persuade) that express a brand's entire existence (Cooper et al., 2010; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1998).

3.1: The Internal and External Brand Narratives

The **internal brand narrative** is representative of a more foundational, introspective approach towards narrative development. By understanding where the company has been, what it's story is, you can more accurately express what it is that the brand stands for (Vincent, 2008). Behind every brand is a promise (a mission statement, why it is that the corporation is doing what it does), a set of core values which it operates according to, and a collection of individuals whom facilitate its continued existence (Brown, 2006; Vincent, 2008).

An internal brand narrative is the intrinsic collective identity of an entire organization. It is made up of multiple shared narratives (founding, important events, statements), business practices, day-to-day function, predominant themes (mission statement, operating principles), and their narrators (employees, management, founders, etc.), all of which facilitate a shared understanding of the brand in question (Brown, 2006; Kantor, 2011). This is most akin to the initial conceptions of narrative identity expressed within the personality literature (Kantor, 2011). Narrative identity, by its original definition, is intrinsic and defined internally, though certainly affected by outside sources (McAdams, 1996). It is almost entirely self-selected; an individual chooses the events in his/her past that are believed to be most descriptive of whom he/she is today (McLean, 2008). The difference between narrative identity and internal brand narrative stems from the polyphonic nature of an organization's story. Brands are monolithic entities constituted of a plethora of subatomic components; the makeup of the brand's internal narrative will be similarly multifaceted (Brown, 2006; Hazen, 1993).

The internal narrative permeates past the internal dealings of the corporation by directly affecting that brand's external voice (Vincent, 2008). It is one method outlet through which brands convey identity to shareholders and consumers alike, and is reflected in the behavior and

statements made by a company or its representatives (Kantor, 2011). Accordingly, it is one facet which intelligent marketing firms attempt to define, and if necessary, modify (Kapferer, 2008; Vincent, 2008). If a brand is in touch with its own internal brand narrative, the expression of its core message becomes clarified, and any marketing which utilizes it becomes more effective (Kapferer, 2008).

The **external brand narrative**, in contrast, is entirely concerned with the *perceived* identity of a brand, and the traits/characteristic adaptations attributed to the brand based off of these perceptions. The ascriptions of personality variables held by the end consumer are influenced by different modes of contact an individual has with the brand's entire story (J. L. Aaker, 1997). These influences can be either *direct* or *indirect*. Direct influences are either *demonstrative* or *reflective*, while indirect influences can be *communal*, *societal*, *comparative*, or *reflexive*.

An **indirect influence** is a non-brand/corporate source of narrative which go to shape the consumer perceptions of a brand's narrative, and thereby its' identity and personality. Four distinct narratives make up the entirety of indirect influences; the *reflexive influence*, the *communal influence*, the *competitive influence* and the *sociocultural influence*.

A **direct influence** is the element of a brand's ascribed personality that is forged via observation and interpretation of a brand's behavior. Though these inferences are in part based on the explicit messages intentionally conveyed by a brand, the behavior which companies elicit is not always the result of strategic planning and management. The direct influence can be even further separated into two distinct sources of narrative, the *reflective influence* and the *demonstrative influence*.

3.2: *The Reflective Influence.*

The qualities and components of a brand's internal narrative, and the behaviors of related representatives and associated individuals/corporate partners, are *reflected* in the speech and behavior elicited by that brand and related entities (individual employees, affiliated companies and brands, etc.) (Dahlén et al., 2010; Vincent, 2002, 2008). This is henceforth known as the **reflective influence**. The reflective influence is inclusive of actions of individuals associated with the brand (off-the-cusp statements made by an employee, for example), the behaviors of other companies connected with the brand, and any conduct or statement by the managing corporation which was unplanned and/or unintended to be seen by the public eye.

Brands are engaged in the business of persuasion and impression management (Cialdini, 2006; Randazzo, 2006). A brand whose internal narrative is expressive of youthful exuberance and technological innovation will present themselves to the world differently than a brand whose roots are more conservative by nature (Cialdini et al., 1976; Randazzo, 2006; Vincent, 2002, 2008). The literature often points to Apple as an excellent example of a brand whose narrative is imbued with elements evident in its corporate history. Apple's narrative is riddled with elements that connote *creativity* (Fitzsimons, Chartrand, & Fitzsimons, 2008; Kantor, 2011). Though their longtime slogan ("*Think Differently*") is a product of the company's marketing strategy (addressed later in this paper), the use of this particular phrase is representative of Apple's understanding of its history and culture. Apple is not the inventor of the personal computer, nor did it invent the MP3 player or smartphone. The brand's core promise does not prescribe innovation through *invention*, but rather, through *simplification* (Giesler, 2008; Linzmayer, 2004). By creatively streamlining normally complex functions, the end user is more inclined to utilize the tool in original and novel ways (Kapferer, 2008). The iPod and iPhone products (both

are revisions to already-existing technology, popularized by their sheer intuitiveness) are both instances of this philosophy in action, and this philosophy is evident in its' entire history.

Apple's history of innovation and its embrace of creative ideas have resulted in a competitive internal culture which favors outside-the-box thinking (Fitzsimons et al., 2008). Today, the company is considered one of the best tech companies to work for, and employs some of the most gifted and creative minds in the numerous markets Apple finds itself in

The actions of external actors can deeply affect the image a brand is attempting to connote (Keller, 2003). A good example of this is the recent scandal involving Apple's electronics manufacturer (Bapna, 2012). Foxconn, the manufacturer of many of Apple's most popular devices and products, has recently been accused of engaging in worker maltreatment and underpayment, culminating in a number of recent suicide attempts by several Foxconn employees (Oremus, 2012). Of course, Foxconn also manufactures gadgets for a number of other companies, but the reports were much more damaging to Apple, whom has expressed concern for social and economic issues; they are thought of as a progressive, humanistic brand concerned for the wellbeing of others (Oremus, 2012). The Foxconn scandal has caused consumers to question and edit a pristine, pro-social narrative Apple had worked very hard to maintain.

3.3: The Demonstrative Influence.

The **demonstrative influence** refers to any express effort a brand undertakes in order to establish the values, traits, ideals, and other aspect of human personality they wish to be associated with. A brand's associated personality is formulated via a number of inferences made by consumers, which are all based on the narratives brands have exhibited and the actions corporations have undergone to support these assertions (Escalas, 2004). The key element to the

demonstrative is *planning*; this influence embodies everything which the brand wishes for you to see and to process. Advertising is easily the most notable display of the demonstrative influence, but it is not the only method brands use to share the brand narratives (Keller, 2003).

The demonstrative influence can be subdivided into two smaller categories: the *explicit* and the *implicit* demonstrative influence. The **explicit demonstrative influence** describes any attempt by the brand to influence consumer perception via direct persuasion. It is by far the more direct of the two demonstrative influences, and is inclusive of a number of different actions which brands engage in, including radio/television/billboard advertisement, press releases, endorsements, sponsorships, and other useful tools (Dahlén et al., 2010; Keller, 2003). Each one of these methods of communication can be used to influence individuals towards the desired sense of brand personality, be it via a well-tailored advertisement campaign, the announcement of a celebrity endorsement, the public support of a charitable cause, or any other discernible statement meant to persuade in some way.

Price is another example of the explicit demonstrative influence; a brand whose identity is centralized around providing high value to its consumers (Wal-Mart or Vizio, for example) will utilize lower prices (Reid, 2011) to emphasize this identity (Fitzsimons et al., 2008). Good marketing builds symbolic connections between brands and strong, effective narratives in order to facilitate the production of a strong brand personality (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998).

The **implicit demonstrative influence** is a similarly planned instrument of persuasion, but the method of communication used does not involve any expressed statements. The implicit demonstrative involves elements of a product's marketing campaign that affect the perception of a brand's personality *without* having to rely on any direct communication from the brand itself. A product's packaging, for example, provides sensory information, which can affect the

perceptions of the product being sold (Dahlén et al., 2010) and the brand whom produced it (Kapferer, 2008; Keller, 1991). Other examples of implicit demonstrative influences include, but are not limited to, product placement in movies (Cooper et al., 2010), cleanliness and ambiance of the physical locations representative of the brand (Dahlén et al., 2010), and unexpressed celebrity endorsement (Escalas & Bettman, 2003).

Most marketing strategies blur the line between the implicit and explicit demonstrative influences. The brand's name is often an expression of the message a brand wishes to convey (Gardner & Levy, 1999), but the message expressed can be implicit *or* explicit depending on the chosen moniker. The name in itself can generate explicit associations with desired aspects of brand personality (D. A. Aaker, 1991), or the word can carry implicit meaning meant to connote substance on a less conscious level (Ferraro et al., 2009; Kapferer, 2008).

The difference between the two is best demonstrated by comparing brands representative of each extreme. *Orange*, a mobile-phone service provider in the United Kingdom, does not explicitly imply anything which is explicitly useful to the personality of a telecommunications company. But this is precisely the point; the name reflects the values of the founders whom wished to express the unconventional nature of the company they were building (Kapferer, 2008). By naming their company Orange, its founders chose to emphasize the differences between itself and those whom they were competing with, as opposed to giving the brand a more traditional moniker. The *Sharp* brand name, in comparison, innately connotes high intelligence and elements of sophisticated design. In a bulletin outlining the Sharp Corporation's identity building strategies, the company's marketing division sought to pair descriptors of desirable personality characteristics with the brand's slogan at the time, "*Be Sharp*" (for example: "Be

Inspired. Be Sharp”, or “Be Passionate, Be Sharp”) (Sharp Electronics Corporation, 2001). The meaning of the brand’s name is immediately apparent.

Still others exist somewhere in between. The Ecco Corporation (a temp agency) focuses on its phonetic similarity with the word “Echo”, and accordingly shapes its advertisement; temps from Ecco will perfectly echo those whom they are replacing (Kapferer, 2008). The word Ecco also resembles the word “Economy”, a resemblance which has not been used in the company’s varied marketing attempts but is implicitly discernible (Kapferer, 2008). The demonstrative influence is thereby organized on a bipolar *continuum*, ranging from explicit to implicit. These examples demonstrate two different poles of the demonstrative influence. The strategies utilized by marketers cannot easily be categorized as *only* implicitly or explicitly demonstratively; the perceptual effects of most strategies exist somewhere in between.

The core assertion behind the demonstrative influence, is that by producing a coherent, consistent, and desirable narrative (which must be corroborated by a number of different sources of both types of influence) the formation of a consistent and pronounced brand personality is encouraged (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010; Randazzo, 2006). This promotes emotional connection with the narrative and, through association, the brand (Randazzo, 2006).

3.4: *The Reflexive Influence*

The perceptions of an external brand narrative are shaped not only by the content within the narratives themselves, but also by how individuals respond to, conceptualize, understand and then utilize these brands. The **reflexive influence** refers to the method in which *consumers*

respond to, and thereby affect, a brand's narrative. It is the first of four elements which constitute the *indirect influence*

Individuals respond to brand narratives, as earlier reported, by choosing ones whose characteristics are socially preferably or similar to their own (Huang et al., 2012) and integrating these selected brands into one's overall identity (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Fitzsimons et al., 2008). These brands are furthermore used as a method by which to define (Escalas, 2004) and express one's own self-identity to others (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Huang et al., 2012).

Consumers will utilize products made by brands signifying belonging to a socially-preferred (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Hirschman, 2010). Group-affiliated brands serve as an indicator of belongingness to a larger entity, thereby facilitating cooperative tendencies and allowing for quicker identification of members (Hirschman, 2010). This process is aided and facilitated by the propagation of the postmodern form of identity development in today's society, which conceives of the narrative self as the summation of a number of distinct and independent parts (Ahuvia, 2005; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). Two methods of processing are implicated in the processing and utilization of brand narratives; the *Extended Elaboration Likelihood Model* and *Narrative Processing*.

The Extended Elaboration Likelihood Model (EELM), based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) originally theorized by Petty & Cacioppo (1986), suggests that narrative engagement, and its subsequent ability to persuade, is dependent entirely on the needs, goals and values of the consumer (Slater & Rouner, 2002). The original ELM would suggest that increased relevance would lead to central analysis of the content, thereby limiting that narrative's ability to persuade consumers (Hinyard & Kreuter, 2007; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). But studies attempting to demonstrate this have yielded either mixed or the opposite result; the use of

narratives seems to lead to more peripheral processing, not central (Hinyard & Kreuter, 2007; Roberson, Collins, & Oreg, 2005), leading some researcher to conclude that the Elaboration Likelihood Model does not wholly explain narrative persuasion (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010)

In contrast, the EELM predicts engagement with a narrative as dependent on how relevant the narrative is to the consumer (Hinyard & Kreuter, 2007; Slater & Rouner, 2002). If the narrative is irrelevant to the consumer in question, the processing of this message conforms to the ELM (Slater & Rouner, 2002). But if the *narrative* in question is *appealing* and *relevant* to a particular consumer, he/she becomes engaged in the narrative, its' plot and its' characters, via narrative transportation and absorption (Slater & Rouner, 2002). This reduces internal counterargument and dissonance, leads to a more peripheral mode of processing, leaves the individual more receptive to messages of persuasion within the narrative (Hinyard & Kreuter, 2007; Slater & Rouner, 2002), and produces an increase in emotional involvement (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010; Randazzo, 2006), which is crucial both to recall and the attribution of personality elements to the brands (Randazzo, 2006).

Narrative processing (Escalas, 2004; Pals, 2006), is defined as a set of cognitive strategies and assumptions used to make sense of incoming storylines, with the purpose of facilitating the integration of these accounts within one's overarching life narrative (Pals, 2006). According to Escalas (2004), a narrative is processed comparatively; incoming narrative information is matched to episodes already stored in memory to facilitate comprehension and expedite the process of recognition (Schank & Abelson, 1995). Once a narrative is deemed to be relevant to the self-concept, narrative processing provides further contexts likely the reason why the use of common story archetypes is so effective (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010; Kantor, 2011).

The person, familiar with the type of story being presented to him/her, can more expediently understand and define the story he/she has been presented with (Cooper et al., 2010).

3.5. *The Communal Influence.*

Brand personalities do not exist in a vacuum; they are most certainly influenced by the cultures and communities which make up the world they operate in. The **communal influence** is demonstrative of the affects a community has on perceptions of brand narrative. Alexander, Shouten, and Koenig (2002) loosely define community as some number of members, and the relationships and ties which exist between them. These ties tend to be based on some shared commonality, whether it be due to geographic proximity (neighbors), ideological congruence (political parties) or any other of the massive number of possible variables of commonality (McAlexander, Shouten, & Koenig, 2002). The meaning of community extends far past a geographic location, but is rather derived by the shared understanding of commonality a number of people may have with one another.

According to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), communities tend to be further characterized by three critical core components. The first, which the authors refer to as *consciousness in kind*, speaks to an internal recognition of one's commonalities with the community they belong to. The second, *shared rituals*, refers to a communities core set of actions, be it tradition or ritual, which is reflective of the history and culture of that community. Finally, the third is a *sense of moral responsibility*, which speaks to one's innate feelings of obligation towards the community in question (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). The concept of community is thereby one of intense feelings of connection with one another.

The question, therefore, is how does community come to affect the narratives which a brand is attempting to convey? How is it that these communities shape the perceptions of its members? The answer to this question is best exemplified by examining instances of special type of community concerned entirely with the brand affiliations they hold. These groups are known in the literature as *brand communities*, introduced to the literature by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001). Brand communities, like any other society, are marked by the aforementioned three core components of communal belonging, yet all three of these qualities are situated within the larger context of shared affiliation towards an iconic brand (McAlexander et al., 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). These communities are bound by the results of consumer behavior; a brand community is a conglomerate of voices and opinions regarding the value and identity of a single brand. Though these brand communities are generally focused on the positive attribute these brands possess, these communities are the first to exhibit their dismay when the brand engages in an action they do not approve of (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Harley-Davidson owners, for example, rebelled strongly in the 1980s once it was announced that the new design of the iconic motorcycle would produce less sound and higher gas mileage (Vincent, 2008)

When communities begin to discuss a brand's personality, about the narratives that brand exhibits, initial conceptions of brand narrative are altered as a function of this discussion. According to McLean (2008), the construction of identity is facilitated and maintained by interpersonal sharing of one's stories with other individuals. The story thereby moves into the external world and is either validated or critiqued by external actors (McLean, 2008). Brand communities facilitate conversation regarding the brands they have chosen to affiliate with (McAlexander et al., 2002), though the commitment to these brands sometimes borders on religious extremism and may therefore not be conducive to productive conversation (Schouten &

McAlexander, 1995). Communities, therefore, facilitate the growth of a brand image through communication and sharing of one's cumulative brand understanding with another. Positive brand personality, once conceived of by the individual, is reinforced by positive experiences with the brand in question (both the product and those whom represent it), and qualitatively effected by involvement with other individuals whom purport to know about the brand in question (McAlexander et al., 2002). Individuals whom have poor experiences with a brand tend to shy away, and will do so until these perceptions are changed via external persuasion

3.6. The Sociocultural Influence.

The **sociocultural influence** refers to the cultural differences between populations and the markets which they embody. Culture, according to Aaker, Martinez and Galorera (2001), refers to an overarching set of stable values, ideals and leanings specific to the domain in question. In the literature, culture tends to be perceived dualistically. The first conception speaks to a very broad sense of culture, characterized by nationalistic tendencies (Roth, 1995). As a function of their history, of their own narrative, the culture of a country is stable and has an influence on all or most members of that national entity. The second is more regional by its nature, fragmented, and concerned with the cultural norms of micro-level communities (J. L. Aaker, Benet-Martinez, & Garolera, 2001) .

According to McLean (2008), a culture is representative of the ideal character, of who we want to become, of what is acceptable. These ideals shift dramatically between cultures; the ideals, values, and themes which are glorified in one culture are panned in another (McAdams & Pals, 2006). Different cultures come to emphasize different patterns of characteristic adaptations and narrative identities (McAdams & Pals, 2006). The values, biases and personality traits which

are favored by individual actors are in some part a function of the culture you are a part of, and the society in which that culture subsists within.

The purpose behind brand narrative is the production of a positive, desirable identity for the symbolic entity; the traits, characteristic adaptations and narratives used to demonstrate this personality must therefore shift depending on the culture in which advertisement is taking place within. This is not to say that there are not commonalities between different sub-cultures; Aaker, Martinez and Garolera demonstrated a distinct similarity between desired brand personality values between the United States and Japan (J. L. Aaker et al., 2001). There are, however, differences in culturally-preferred desirable characteristic adaptations and self-defining narratives (McAdams & Pals, 2006; Roth, 1995). As such, it would be relatively inadvisable for an international corporation to attempt to forge a single cohesive personality applicable to residents from the entire world.

3.7. The Competitive Influence.

All inferences of personality are heavily based on the social contexts in which these impressions are acquired (Wyer, Budesheim, Lambert, & Swan, 1994). The **competitive influence** concerns the effect of outside, rivaling companies which contend for a limited set of resources. The narrative itself does provide potentially salient information regarding external competitors (Cooper et al., 2010; Wyer et al., 1994), but competing narratives supply conflicting information, resulting in dueling narratives which the consumer must comparatively evaluate (Biel, 1993).

The marketing literature often marks *brand positioning*, defined as the process of producing a brand identity in relation to the present market, as an exceedingly important element

of a successful marketing strategy (Biel, 1993; Dahlén et al., 2010). It is angle which a brand uses to carve a successful niche in the existing market (Kapferer, 2008), by exerting similarity to existing brands (connoting authenticity) while simultaneously achieving differentiation (Ghodeswar, 2008). A brand's market positioning is an exceptionally important element of a good brand narrative (Biel, 1993; Dahlén et al., 2010; Ghodeswar, 2008; Kapferer, 2008). The narratives of relevant outside brands shape the context within which consumers understand the personalities of the brands they are exposed to (Kapferer, 2008). These narratives are beyond the control of the brand attempting to coexist.

Absolute and *relative* positioning are key categorical elements of a brand's comparative alignment in the relevant market (Dahlén et al., 2010). *Relative* positioning references a brand's attempt to carve out its own niche by expressing the qualities which make it unique. This is more representative of the demonstrative influence and will be discussed later. *Absolute* positioning pertains to the necessary values and characteristics which other brands in a defined market already embody (Dahlén et al., 2010). A brand must embody at least some of these qualities in order to be considered a serious alternative to already-established entities. A brand's *absolute* positioning is almost entirely reliant on the external market, beyond the control of a single entity and thus an indirect influence on the external brand narrative.

When deducing a brand's persona, consumers are affected by a brand's *typicality* of the relevant product category, and its *similarity* to other brands (Dahlén et al., 2010). A *typical* motorcycling brand is one which personifies the stereotyped schemas which the public has acquired (Dahlén et al., 2010; Kleine et al., 1993). The *Harley-Davidson* exemplifies this stereotype for western consumers (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005); it is a brand synonymous with the American outlaw and explorer (Twitchell, 2004). The bike's design emits a

sense of unconventional disregard for external regulation. It is heavy and inefficient, but extremely well-designed and durable. Brands that attempt to enter the motorcycle market are immediately compared to the schema of the typical motorcycle (Dahlén et al., 2010); if significant ingredients of that brand persona are missing, the brand will break expectation and will likely fail to garner any significant market share.

The typicality market schema is completely independent of the individual actor whom conceived of it in the first place. Harley may be the source of the free-wheeling American outlaw, but the brand is held to the exact same expectations as any other actor within the market. In the 1970s, the Harley-Davidson Corporation faced increased competition from Japanese companies producing more fuel-efficient motorcycles at a lower price (Lee & Shum, 2010). This prompted a rapid and tactless redesign of their standard bike as a lower-quality, but more fuel-efficient machine. Consumers responded by shifting allegiances to bikes designed by Japanese companies, which crippled the corporation (Lee & Shum, 2010). The company was eventually sold to a group of 13 investors whom were hyperaware of the image consumers expected from Harley, and the brand experienced revitalization as the core schema was reaffirmed and the bicycles returned to being expensive, high-quality machines.

In comparison, *similarity* is not concerned with a brand's level of congruence with the common values characteristic of the desired market, but rather of the other competing brands within it (Dahlén et al., 2010). As exemplified above in the Harley-Davidson example, certain brands become exemplary of the image of an entire market (Red-Bull is quickly becoming the prototypical energy drink) (Dahlén et al., 2010), but this is not the norm. There is usually a plurality of brands which compete for market saturation, each of which possessing a set of shared traits predicated by the market, and those which make the company distinct from all others

(Keller, 2000). Consumers evaluate a brand's narrative based not only on the content they are receiving from the target company, but in relation to both the other salient brands in the relevant markets and the values and attributes which characterize the market itself (Dahlén et al., 2010; Keller, 1991, 2000)

Chapter 4: The Makeup of an Effective Brand Narrative

Brand narrative is a multivariate construct, the culmination of a multitude of different influences which ultimately affect the perceptions and decisions made by buyers and sellers (Cooper et al., 2010; Dahlén et al., 2010; Vincent, 2008). A brand's personality is the summation of eight separate variables appropriated to the brand; awareness, attributes, benefits, images, thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and experiences (Keller, 2003). This paper has established the *structural* makeup of a brand's overarching narrative, but the *substance* expressed by sellers is just as important. An effective brand narrative is ultimately achieved via the creation of strong, positive associations between each of the above eight elements and the brand in question (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). It is solidified by dispersing the message across the several levels of brand narrative expressed earlier in this piece.

According to Jobber (2004), all successful brand narratives share the following four separate elements: *clarity*, *consistency*, *competitiveness* and *credibility*. This paper postulates a couple of edits to this list. Credibility, for example, is redundant; a narrative that does not hold up to scrutiny is one that lacks *consistency* with the brand's overarching story. Additionally, this paper postulates the necessity of one more element, *compatibility*. The four elements which all successful narratives share are *clarity*, *consistency*, *competitiveness*, and *compatibility*.

4.1: Clarity

A compelling brand narrative begins with a **clear**, concise, and coherent narrative and a matching persona (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010). The message being conveyed must be clear and easily understood, as should the persona which it explicates. A clear brand narrative provides a clear answer to the question: "What do we stand for" (Tybout & Sternthal, 2005).

Clear, effective storytelling and narrative advertisement are both *very* reliant on the use of familiar archetypes used by storytellers for centuries (Kantor, 2011). A robust brand narrative is bolstered via the use of existing and familiar archetypes of plot, characters, and of diffuse beliefs in order to generate a story conducive to the elaboration of a brand's character (Randazzo, 2006). The use of a plot and character archetypes in a story is conducive to a faster sense of familiarity and recognition of the consumer towards the element in question (Cooper et al., 2010; Hinyard & Kreuter, 2007).

Narrative researchers have attempted to define the exact archetypes implicit in the narratives we utilize; though there is no central, complete list of *every* archetype used in the stories our cultures tell, the literature does yield some examples of familiar archetypes used in advertisement and other media outlets (movies, television series, etc.) today. There are *archetypal themes*, which categorically sort all stories into one of four typical thematic descriptions of plot (Origin Stories, Defining Stories, Traditional Stories, and Conflict/Struggle). Similar to this is Booker's (2006) *Seven Basic Plots*, which enumerate seven common archetypal themes recurrent in every kind of storytelling; rebirth, quest, journey and return, rags to riches, tragedy, comedy, and overcoming the monster (Booker, 2006; Nudd, 2012). Similar to the archetypes of plot are those implicit in the characters use in an attempt to make them more familiar to consumers (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010). These character archetypes include, but are certainly not limited to, the roles of mother, rebel, mentor, rugged individualist, champion, and the underdog. The use of familiar plot and character types in narratives creates an increased sense of familiarity and connection with the story, which produces narrative transportation, absorption, and therefore a decrease in resistance to persuasive messages (Hinyard & Kreuter, 2007; Roberson et al., 2005; Slater & Rouner, 2002).

4.2: Consistency

A brand's demonstrative narrative must be **consistent** with the existing history of the company, must remain consistent as time progresses (Jobber, 2004). If the brand's chosen narrative is inconsistent with an already-existing notion of brand personality, or utilizes a story which makes little sense for the company to be using, the resulting reactions of consumers are of confusion, unease, and even ridicule (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010). Maintaining consistency across the multiple sources of brand narratives ensures the integration of all received messages into once singular impression (Lindberg-Repo & Grönroos, 2004). People strive for consistency across the multitude of their beliefs and associations; if an individual's ascriptions of brand persona are contradicted by an inconsistent message, the resulting cognitive dissonance causes confusion and feelings of tension (Paasovaara et al., 2012).

In an article written for the New York Times Magazine, Draper (2008) demonstrated the negative effects of a poorly planned brand narrative, as exemplified by the McCain for President Campaign in 2008. Over the course of the campaign, McCain presented his values and his overall identity to the American people, as all candidates do. The problems arose after voters realized that many of these narratives seemed contradictory towards one another; the *heroic fighter* ("Stay in Iraq, the surge is working!") vs. the *quitter* ("I support a timetable for withdrawal!"). The *team of mavericks* ("We work from both sides of the aisle, and will change Washington!") vs. the *career-politician* ("I've been a senator for 20 years"). The discrepancy between the multitude of positions and identities he took during the course of the campaign, and the inconsistency of his remarks, resulted in an unclear message and significant confusion.

A brand with a strong consistent narrative will still fail if that narrative is under-exposed. The more exposure a consumer receives, the more that individual will prefer that brand over others (Ferraro et al., 2009). Powerful brands therefore distribute its necessarily consistent narrative across a multitude of realms in order to increase overall media exposure, and therefore, feelings of familiarity and likelihood of a positive attribution of brand personality (Dahlén et al., 2010; Reid, 2011).

4.3: Competitiveness

A narrative must frame itself within the existing market, against its competition. This paper spoke of a brand's **competitiveness** earlier; it is an exceptionally important element of a good brand narrative (Biel, 1993; Dahlén et al., 2010; Ghodeswar, 2008; Kapferer, 2008). We spoke of a brand's positioning as *absolute* and *relative* positioning earlier; they are the angles which a brand use to carve a successful niche in the existing market (Ghodeswar, 2008; Kapferer, 2008). Though the necessary *absolute* positioning cannot be manipulated by any one entity, the *relative* position of a brand gives a brand further definition itself by demonstrating its persona and functional advantages in relation to other actors in the market (Dahlén et al., 2010; Ghodeswar, 2008). This element of brand narrative provides the answer to the question "Why should I choose this brand over any another" (Tybout, Calkins, & Kellogg School of Management, 2005).

A well-defined brand provides a richer, more sustainable source of competitive advantage (Ghodeswar, 2008). Though copying a competitor's product is extremely easy, it is exceptionally difficult to emulate a brand's personality (Vincent, 2002). Studies have shown that perceptions of quality are enhanced with the addition of a positive brand personality, even if the products being

compared with one another are functionally equivalent (Belk, 1988; Biel, 1993; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Huang et al., 2012)

In a relatively recent fMRI study, McClure and colleagues (2004) looked at taste preferences of cola as a function of brand association. Individuals were randomly assigned to either the anonymous delivery (not told which is which) or brand-cued delivery (informed as to what brand of soda they were consuming). Prior to the start of the examination, individuals preferences were polled; some liked Coca-Cola, others like Pepsi. Chemically speaking, the two are almost entirely identical with one another, save a small number of minute differences; for the purposes of this experiment, the two are exactly the same. Individuals were administered their taste tests while their brains were being scanned by an fMRI (McClure et al., 2004). Results indicated a strong effect of brand on brain function; as compared to the blind test, when individuals were administered Coke (even for those whom self-reported as liking Pepsi better) the hippocampus and the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex lit up (McClure et al., 2004). These two brain structures are generally associated with memory and self-image (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010); though the actual product Coca-Cola produces isn't much different than that of their biggest competitor, the mere exposure to their brand produced sizable cognitive change.

4.4: Compatibility

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a good brand narrative must be **compatible** with an individual's values, as well as those ascribed by societal, cultural, and communal influences. Brands use narratives to link to desirable elements of social and popular culture (Cooper et al., 2010; Vincent, 2002) and individuals tend to choose brands that reflect values which resonate with their own self-concept (Schembri et al., 2010). Brands must therefore identify compelling

stories that are consistent with the company, the products they are selling, and the persona they are attempting to develop, while also appealing directly to the values and goals of consumers they are attempting to reach (Hinyard & Kreuter, 2007; Randazzo, 2006; Robertson & Murre, 1999). Brand narratives must remain compatible with and relevant to society as its' values continuously shift (Keller, 2003). A brand can present a consistent and clear narrative, but if this narrative is offensive, irrelevant, or overshadowed by a competitor with more socially compatible message, individuals will choose that latter brand (Huang et al., 2012).

Not all brand narratives are created equally. Jensen & Jepsen (2006) have stated that 'the brand with the best story wins'. If two brands present advertisements which are comparatively clear, consistent, compatible and competitive, a consumer will prefer the more engaging of the two ads (Dahlén et al., 2010). Marketers use storytelling to order to engage, effect, and forge symbolic bonds between consumers and brands (Vincent, 2002).

Storytelling is a much more effective mode of persuasion than a monologue (Dahlén et al., 2010; Huang et al., 2012; Kantor, 2011). Stemming from the origins of our ability to communicate with one another, the primary tool of explanation has been storytelling since the beginning of interpersonal communication (Kantor, 2011; Vincent, 2008). The use of self-defining memories and narrative identity is integral to both the internal definition and outward presentation of a person's personality (McAdams et al., 2004; Pals, 2006), and so it comes as no surprise to learn that we are much open to information delivered in the guise of a tale.

Narrative is used as a tool to facilitation motivation, inspiration and inspiration in the consumer, and does so in a way that methods which look simply to inform the consumer do not (Cooper et al., 2010; Simmons, 2006). Using stories as a method of identity formation ignites emotional, empathetic and sympathetic responses, which strengthen the connection between the

brand and the consumer in question (Randazzo, 2006) and provide a greater chance of inducing change in beliefs, attributions, and therefore consumer behavior (Dahlén et al., 2010). Using elements of storytelling allows for a more appealing and memorable advertisement itself, which itself is becoming more and more important (Dahlén et al., 2010). With the increase of ad-filtering tools (ad-blockers, DVRs, etc.), marketing has necessarily moved towards ads which have entertainment value in themselves (Vincent, 2002).

Chapter 5: The Faltering BlackBerry Brand – The Brand Narrative Approach to Analyzing and Designing a Good Marketing Campaign

A brand's overarching narrative identity shapes the way consumers, communities and societies comprehend a personified brand. The *internal* narrative is a non-projective description of the innate story of the brand, and those whom have worked to get it where it is today. The *external* narrative is the story the public sees, and is built entirely on consumer perception. The brand impacts the story consumers perceive via the use of *direct influences*, which include the *reflective* and *demonstrative influences*. Consumers are also affected by *indirect influences* unrelated to the volition of the brand in question, which include the *reflexive, sociocultural, and communal* influences. A successful brand narrative is clear, consistent, competitive and compatible. The definition and propagation of a brand narrative whose marketing team has considered and controlled for of the above variables, produces a powerful brand personality.

For some corporations, brand personality is an unplanned outcome, the product of years of advertising and media exposure culminating in an association with a set of human characteristics typically descriptive of personality. For others, brand personality is carefully crafted, manipulated, controlled and propagated. Companies understand that the perceived narrative of a brand, the personality attributed to this entirely iconic entity, affect how people conceive of that brand, and ultimately shape their consumer behavior. With the above explanatory taxonomy, companies can more accurately forge and control the personalities of their brands and intellectual property. A marketer whom was to take every element of the above framework into account would have the tools necessary to craft a powerful brand personality for an entity in need of one.

This paper has provided a litany of evidence to support the assertion that brand personality is a construct of marketing worth arduous consideration. A brand whose personality is defined in accordance to this paper's postulated theoretical model will have a much greater chance of succeeding in the marketplace than one whom has left the personality ascribed by consumers to complete chance.

5.1: A Brief History of the BlackBerry Brand

In 1984, Research in Motion was founded by 23-year old college dropouts Mike Lazaridis and Doug Fregin in Waterloo, Canada, as a tech consulting firm (Sweeny, 2009). Like many tech startups, it started very small – just three employees, all of whom would stay with the company for decades – and was characterized by long hours working on ideas they could not properly fund. Their first real job, a \$600,000 contract with GM building large display boards which could display text messages, worked but failed on the open market (RIM sold less than 100 units) (Sweeny, 2009). The company would eventually focus on wireless data, which at the time was a brand new and unexplored market in the United States (Strom, 2012). In 1989, Mobitex was the only one of a very select few wireless data providers, which at the time was only available in Sweden. As the only developer of wireless data solutions in the United States, RIM was hired to expedite the release of Mobitex in the United States (Strom, 2012; Sweeny, 2009). It was also one of the first companies to explore two-way communication between wireless devices, which was primarily used for credit card charges and minute data exchange at the time, but would become the basis for its entire future as a telecommunications company (Holder, 2010; Sweeny, 2009).

The company's first product was the Inter@ctive Pager 900, a pager which could send and receive emails in a small, clam-shell device with a Qwerty keyboard (Holder, 2010). It was one of very first products to feature bi-directional communication in a pager-like form factor, and though it had its share of problems (mainly in its' weight and high price point), the product set the stage for the eventual wave of small, wireless internet communicators (Holder, 2010; Sweeny, 2009). RIM addressed a number of the initial concerns via the release of the RIM 950, code-named LeapFrog, and would launch the BlackBerry wireless e-mail service soon afterwards. The 950 was then re-branded as the BlackBerry, and it took off. The company began raking in millions of dollars in service fees and hardware sales.

In 2000, RIM unveiled the RIM 957, which was the first BlackBerry with full internet-based email, as well as a browser and paging (Sweeny, 2009). This device is the predecessor to the modern smartphone we know today; it had software for a calendar, address book, calculator, etc, the first mobile applications on a mobile communicator. It also established the PDA, slate-style smartphone, with a backlight screen and a keyboard on the front (a la the popular BlackBerry design our culture has grown to know). The internet browser was slow, but it was functional (Sweeny, 2009). Over the next few years, the BlackBerry would evolve even further; it became a cellular phone (as opposed to a data-only communicator), received a color display, built in a camera and Bluetooth connectivity, among many other innovations, and the brand quickly established itself as the premiere smartphone for the business executive. The BlackBerry network is noted for its security and its steadfast infallibility; in emergencies, while cell networks were overloaded, the BlackBerry data network remained up and running.

The BlackBerry brand also began to permeate past just the professional crowd into popular culture; the term Crackberry can be found in the most recent Miriam-Webster dictionary

(Sweeny, 2009). Presidents, celebrities, and other notable individuals have publically admitted to being CrackBerry addicts, including the doctor who coined the word in the first place (Sweeny, 2009). But as the BlackBerry grew in popularity around the world, innovation in its hardware and software began to stagnate. Other companies began to experiment with the smartphone form factor, the BlackBerry has remained a brick-style phone with a single screen and a physical QWERTY keyboard, essentially the same form factor since the BlackBerry's introduction to the world in the early 2000s (Gross, 2012).

5.2: The Decline of the BlackBerry Brand

With the release of the Apple iPhone and Google's Android platform, the market essentially invented by RIM quickly became saturated with legitimate alternatives to its' stagnating brand (Hicks, 2012). RIM initially benefitted from the increased attention to the smartphone market – though the iPhone and Android platforms were new, BlackBerry still had the most robust messaging network, a dedication to the hardware keyboard, a more established user base and, at the time, essentially the same set of features for less money (Service, 2007). However, as the years went by, Apple and Google continued to innovate, resulting in increased media attention and market share, while Research in Motion continued to provide the same product it had become so well known for (Meyer, 2012). In late 2008, the company began to diversify its offering, but did so rather poorly. The BlackBerry Storm, RIM first touchscreen phone screen (Hicks, 2012) was panned by critics, citing its dysfunctional clicking screen. The BlackBerry Bold was well accepted and featured an updated OS, but it too was simply another iteration of the RIM 957 released so many years prior, and its offerings still lacked the interface quality championed by the iPhone's UI (Gross, 2012).

In addition, the company began to addend its market strategy in order to include consumers they had been ignoring for many years, in an attempt to try and take a bite out of Apple's market share. The result was a marketing strategy formed in the image of Apple's youth-centric Coldplay ads. The attempt was widely ridiculed by the media as plagiaristic and desperate (Bracetti, 2012). BlackBerry's attempt to join the tablet market was met with lackluster reviews and widespread ridicule; the BlackBerry Playbook was the first RIM device to *not* include a built-in email or calendar application (Bracetti, 2012). Further damaging to the brand's reputation was a massive service outage in 2011, which disrupted the brand's claim to a reliable, infallible network (Pepitone, 2011).

In addition to all of this, a letter attributed to a high-level RIM executive was obtained and published by the media, which referred to management transition as "chaotic" and described the work force as "demotivated" (Bracetti, 2012); other reports compared RIM to the Soviet Union (Hicks, 2012). Finally, BlackBerry 10, cited as the long-awaited answer to the newest generation of devices, has been in the works since early 2010, with its release still somewhere in the murky horizon (Hartley, 2011). With each bit of bad news, the stock prices for RIM have sunk lower and lower.

5.3: Marketing Design – The Fall, and Potential Resurrection, of BlackBerry

BlackBerry's problems all seem to stem back to 2007, the year that the iPhone was released. Prior to that, the narrative of the BlackBerry was exceedingly consistent and well-conveyed. The internal narrative of the company, according to Sweeny (2009), was of collaborative growth, based on the company's roots as a small and flexible startup company . Its employees felt free to innovate and to propose new ideas to the CEO, whom remained receptive

to input from all of its employees, and this was reflected in the company's overall attitude. The explicit narrative of the company was of innovative pursuit and expansion. Prior to 2007, BlackBerry operated unopposed in a market it had created and defined, challenged only by brands like Microsoft and Palm, whose operating systems were poorly designed and slow in comparison.

The 2007 BlackBerry advertising campaign was centered on the use of storytelling. RIM asked users of their phones to submit your answer to the question "Why do you love your BlackBerry?" RIM selected the best answers and used them in its advertising campaign, resulting in a well-received set of ads. The stories appealed to a wider audience of potential buyers, and mainly featured doctors, authors and successful entrepreneurs, with the goal of initiating a dialogue with potential clientele (Learned, 2007). Their campaign was broadcast across a wide variety of media types and across the different levels of identity delivery. It was an appealing message that was clear, consistent with the historical narrative of innovation, competitive (individuals love their BlackBerries, as opposed to other smartphones, because...) and widely compatible (individuals saw themselves in the professionals they used in the advertisements; it appealed to the *ideal self* and its values) as well as engaging. The campaign painted individuals whom used BlackBerries as aspiring professionals, an appealing designation in American culture, which lionizes financial and career success. This culture is reflected in the self-concepts of those whom RIM was advertising to – the potential buyer is the person whom wants success, wishes to be taken seriously, and thereby associates sleekness and professionalism with the BlackBerry brand. Media coverage of the campaign was generally very positive, and the campaign was considered a success.

Compare this to BlackBerry's current marketing platform, one which has been universally ridiculed as boring, anticlimactic, ineffective and out of touch. Known as the "*Be Bold*" campaign, the video advertisement depicts a group of protestors picketing an Apple store, with signs asking their potential customers to "Wake Up." This culminates in a number of lines of text accompanied by a high-pitched, irritating voice asking the consumer to "Be Bold", that the BlackBerry is for people whom "don't just think different...they do different", and that "there's only one device for people who mean business..."

The brand-defining narrative current being utilized by RIM is inconsistent with events that have transpired since 2007, and reflects poor consideration of the reflective, communal, reflexive, and competitive influences. The ad attempts to bolster its' business-centric persona by claiming BlackBerry to be the one true device for those whom mean business, but the average consumer is aware of the current smartphone market. Both the iPhone and Android platforms have received increased interest from and adoption by business-oriented clients whom once preferred the BlackBerry brand; incorrectly positioning BlackBerry as "the *only* device for business-types" simply ignores the current market, which brands *cannot do*. Labeling iPhone users as "asleep" without offering any consistent evidence or qualitative statement as to why, both alienates a potential client base and paints the brand as out-of-touch and insincere, qualities a company should not want to be associated with.

Additionally, the recent litany of missteps made by RIM has propagated the existence of a narrative which has been forged by communal perceptions of the brand's reflective actions; that RIM has fallen far, far behind iPhone and Android. The reports of a Soviet-like work environment, the leaked internal memo painting management as incompetent, the dramatic nose-dive of RIM's stock price, and the extreme stupidity in releasing a BlackBerry device without

email or a calendar, have all gone to proliferate the reflective narrative of BlackBerry corporate management as incompetent and ignorant of reality. Finally, the advertisement's message is seemingly attempting to redefine the word business; "being 'in business' means you're the kind of person who takes action and makes things happen." This is both vague and meaningless, which is assumedly by design – anybody can claim to be 'in business' under this definition. But vagueness and meaninglessness are not attributes which should be associated with a brand. Successful brand narratives provide clarity and consistency, not opaque and variable.

When RIM's intrinsic brand narrative, bolstered by a history of industry-leading innovation in the mobile space, was challenged by Apple in 2007, the corporation's lack of a competent response resulted in deep intrinsic identity confusion. BlackBerry was born from the creativity of a number of brilliant minds, whom correctly predicted the eventual desire of consumers to be able to communicate via data transmission, and built an entire business based on innovative guesswork. More than anybody, BlackBerry should have understood the importance of continued innovation to the longevity of a Brand, even within an established business. Instead, the brand stuck with

5.4: The Utilization of the Brand Narrative Taxonomy

Following the taxonomy postulated in the earlier pages of this paper, BlackBerry must first address the inconsistencies with its **internal narrative**. RIM was built by aspiring and innovative computer scientists whom valued creative freedom and personal expression. These valued attributes must be reestablished as paramount in order to bring about the return of an innovative, flexible organization. If employees are not motivated or excited with the work they are producing, something needs to be changed. A good brand must have the support of the family

of employees which make it up; this support will reflect on the external perceptions of brand personality that are conceived of.

Secondly, the demonstrative element of the external narrative must be altered *dramatically*. RIM should *not* be positioning itself as the only logical and legitimate choice, because, frankly, it no longer is. RIM should *not* be ignoring its own shortcoming and missteps leading up to BlackBerry's current situation. RIM should *not* be positioning its current tech as competitive to the iPhone and Android. RIM *should* acknowledge its own recent shortcoming, and base the demonstrative influence around that message.

In order to combat the current narrative of RIM as a hubristic, out-of-touch corporation, RIM must **emphasize the history of innovation** which birthed the BlackBerry brand, and punctuate the company's intent to **return** to the values and mission statement it was conceived from. This narrative acknowledges the company's shortcomings without dwelling on them longer than necessary. RIM should direct attention towards the release of BlackBerry 10, the long-awaited new iteration of the phone's operating system, and begin to liken it to the innovations which brought RIM as much notoriety as it once had. The competitive, sociocultural, and communal influences are thereby accounted for.

The marketing campaign must span a multitude of different media spaces. The television spot would be, at its core, a lesson in the history of the company. It is the story of a couple of young innovators betting everything they had on a passion, on a vision that nobody understood at the time. That vision became the BlackBerry handheld device, a phone which singlehandedly shaped the ways in which we communicate, and coming soon, the next evolution in a revolutionary device. By simply observing the fact that the brand has not just disappointed the potential consumer but itself as well, the narrative is ascribed the quality of consistency, both

with the original narrative of the company and the one forged by consumer perceptions of recent brand behavior. It is a clear and authentic message, it is compatible with societal/cultural/personal values (redemption is an ever-popular plot archetype), and it acknowledges its current place among competitors while leaving room for relative movement.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has helped to demonstrate the sole importance of narrative as the vehicle through which brand personality is ascribed, defined and developed, and the constellation of variables which must be considered when attempting to utilize it. Narrative is an exceptionally useful tool, through which marketers can create additional value and differentiation between brands with very little investment. The links between Personality Psychology and Marketing deserve further study; a clear and coherent brand personality provides a clear market advantage to the entity for which it is defined, but the observation of this construct is still in its infancy and needs to be fleshed out further.

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