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THE STORY ABOUT BRAND VALUES:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF STORYTELLING AS AN INSTRUMENT
FOR CONVEYING BRAND VALUES

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The Story About Brand Values: An Exploratory Study of Storytelling as an Instrument for Conveying Brand Values

Emma Ford, Frida Jakobsson & Lisa Marie Bauer

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of the study is to investigate if companies' brand values are being portrayed in their commercials, through the storytelling they are using, and further on if the values are perceived by the audience.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This study is applying a literature review and a qualitative approach and has been conducted in two steps. First, the authors have constructed a categorization of sampled commercials to select five brands' commercials, which met the criteria of containing storytelling, emotional connections and where the brand behind it operates within the United States. The five brands that are discussed within this study are: Coca-Cola, Under Armour, Guinness, AT&T and Extra. Second, focus groups have been used to analyse the consumer's perception of the brands' different commercials and examine whether the audience identifies the brand values portrayed through the storytelling.

Findings: This study revealed that storytelling in practice is by some brands to communicate brand values, while many brands do not use it effectively. The qualitative study demonstrates that storytelling evokes strong emotional responses among the audience. Furthermore, that the viewers are able to identify the brand values communicated in the story.

Research Limitations/Implications: The research has been carried out with a small sample size and a limited variation in culture, this since the selected brands are restricted to the United States. The total number of participants within the focus groups is low and is not representing the entire population.

Practical Implications: Based on the findings it is recommended to apply storytelling in advertising due to its capability to effectively evoke consumer's emotions and communicate brand values.

Originality/Value: This study contributes to the field of brand management by addressing a research gap through examining how storytelling relates to brand values in commercials. The study offers a valuable insight as it proposes a framework for categorization of storytelling commercials and considers the brand as well as the consumer perspective.

Keywords: Storytelling, Brand values, Brand perception, Emotions, Commercials

Type of Paper: Research Paper

Introduction

Television is the most frequently used medium in the United States, with two thirds of the entire population owning a digital TV service in their household and spends an average of 2.5 hours of watching a day (The Statistics Portal, 2016). This makes TV commercials an effective way for

companies to communicate with their audience and a great opportunity to display their brand. In 2014 the TV advertising expenditure worldwide was 183.5 billion U.S. dollar and by 2019 it is predicted to grow to 233.88 billion U.S. dollar (The Statistics Portal, 2016). In addition to this, social media enables new ways for brands to communicate with their audience and

share their messages. With this much exposure and range of channels to communicate in, companies must compete for the attention and find creative ways to stand out. One way for brands to manage this is by using storytelling. Storytelling refers to the idea of portraying the past, the present and the future as stories to communicate value to be understood (Fog, Budtz, Munch & Blanchette, 2010). The story that is told speaks to our emotions to explain, create understanding and meaning to a certain context (Bengtsson & Östberg, 2006; Hatch & Schultz, 2008).

Today storytelling is a large trend in the field of marketing and is anticipated to be an even more essential part of a brand's marketing activities in a near future, which is accelerated by the increasing importance of web 2.0 (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010; Pulizzi, 2012). The area has been studied in various disciplines and contexts, including psychology (Howard, 1991), management (Brown, 2004), public relations (Kent, 2015) and marketing (Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015; Pulizzi, 2012). Among the previous research that has been conducted in the field of storytelling, as a part of branding, the research is closely linked to the emotional aspects of how it is perceived from a viewer perspective. Burton, McAlister and Hoyer (2015) have examined the emotional response from the audience while watching a television advertisement rather than discussing the connection with the brand behind the advertisement. Another perspective that has been discussed is the usage of storytelling as brand persona, to explain the essentials of a brand's personality and to make it easier to relate to (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010).

Storytelling is broadly recognized and an used phenomenon in brand's marketing activities. In the literature, the suitability of storytelling to communicate brand values has been stressed (Lundqvist, Liljander, Gummerus, van Riel, 2012; Fog et al., 2010). Furthermore, there has been little research conducted in viewer perspective

(Taran & Bakar, 2015). However, there is a gap in the research due to whether the consumers can recognize the brand's values in their stories.

There is a limited amount of studies regarding how practitioners incorporate storytelling within their marketing strategies and brand management. Therefore, this article aims to investigate if companies' brand values are being portrayed in their commercials, through the storytelling they are using, and further on if the values are perceived by the audience. This by examining how brands portray themselves in TV commercials, if the brand's core values are consistent with the message they are sending, and if the viewer can understand the brand's values through the story that is told in the commercial. The authors of this article aim for this explorative study to be a academic contribution within the field of brand management, to provide new insights regarding the relation between storytelling and brand values.

The outline of this article initiates with a literature review, where previous research is presented, followed by methodology, a presentation of the examined brands, research results, analysis and a presentation of the findings. Finally, research limitations and recommendations for further research are presented.

Literature Review

Storytelling

Storytelling is facing increasing attention in the area of marketing, not only by academics (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010) and practitioners (Pusch, 2015), but also by firms (Pulizzi, 2012a). The number of companies, which have recognized storytelling as a valuable marketing method, is growing (Lundqvist et al., 2012; Baker, 2009). Companies such as Coca Cola and Pusch include storytelling as integral parts of their marketing strategies (Pulizzi, 2012a; Puig, 2016).

Within the area of marketing, research on storytelling has been conducted in different contexts. The applicability of storytelling as an instrument to increase the emotional component of sponsorship has been demonstrated (Baker & Boyle, 2009). In relation to social media, research on the co-creation of brand stories by the brand and the consumer is available (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Furthermore, corporate storytelling has been examined as an instrument to achieve employees' commitment and loyalty (Gill, 2015; Fog et al., 2010).

In the context of branding, previous research is available on storytelling and its effect on consumer's brand experience (Lundqvist et al., 2013) as well as the relationship between a consumer and a brand (Carnevale, 2015). With regard to the emotional aspect of storytelling, the usage of a brand persona in the story has been discussed, as it builds a strong emotional connection with the spectator (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010).

Research on how storytelling is perceived by the audience and on how it is linked to the brand is still limited. Burton, McAlister and Hoyer (2015) did not focus on storytelling, but examined the emotional response from the audience while watching a television advertisement. But the connection with the brand beyond the advertisement was not discussed (Burton, McAlister & Hoyer, 2015).

Taran and Bakar (2015) conducted research to test consumer's perception of storytelling ads. However, their aim was to reveal how the audience's different cultural backgrounds affect the interpretation of storytelling commercials. How the brand's values are perceived from the commercials has not been included in the study (Taran & Bakar, 2015).

In marketing related literature the term storytelling is used to describe different phenomena. Woodside (2008) speaks of storytelling to refer to stories that consumers tell about other people or themselves

and in which they include brands as actors. Hjelmgren (2016) describes stories told through different touch points in a retail setting as storytelling, with the goal to build brand meaning.

Storytelling in the context of this paper is delimited from the above descriptions and refers to the idea of portraying the past, the present and the future as stories to communicate value to be understood (Fog et al., 2010). The story that is told speaks to the emotions of the audience to explain, create understanding and meaning to a certain context (Bengtsson & Östberg, 2006; Hatch & Schultz, 2008). Specifically in this paper, the term storytelling will be limited to refer to narration in form of words or moving images, with companies or brands as the sender (Fog et al., 2010; Gill, 2015).

Fog et al. (2010) distinguish two functions of storytelling. It can either serve as an instrument for strategic branding or for communication on a more operational level. The former describes the development of one specific core story, which illustrates the company's or brand's values. The latter views storytelling as a method, used for example in advertising, to deliver a message (Fog et al., 2010). The understanding of storytelling as a communication tool is adopted for this research paper. This is because the phenomenon studied is commercials, which apply storytelling as an instrument in marketing communication.

For marketing purposes storytelling is a suitable instrument (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010) because people's minds are story based (Schank, 1999). Humans store and reclaim messages in the scheme of stories. Thus, information in the form of stories is recalled more easily (Woodside, 2010). Telling stories aims at evoking the audience's emotions and empathy and triggers its imagination (McKee, 2003; Baker, 2009; Fog et al., 2010). By engaging the recipient emotionally, a well-told story can be memorable (McKee, 2003). Storytelling cannot only be used to relay information,

but also values and visions (Baker, 2009). In this context it can be applied to convince or motivate the audience (Huj, 2008). An advantage of storytelling in comparison to generic advertising is that its impact lasts longer (Baker, 2009).

The usage of storytelling is beneficial in order to reach marketing objectives. Advertising which makes use of stories to convey messages is evaluated less critical by the audience than generic advertisements. Furthermore, it leads to fewer unfavourable thoughts and rather induces solid positive, affective resonance (Escalas, 2004). Stories are regarded to be more effective than facts in persuading the audience. This leads to higher awareness, greater perceived uniqueness and more trust in the brand (Kaufman, 2003; Kelley & Littman, 2006; Mossberg & Nissen Johansen, 2006, all cited by Lundqvist et al., 2012). Moreover, storytelling can contribute to achieving more internal as well as external strength of the brand (Fog et al., 2010).

Lundqvist et al. (2012) as well as Fog et al., (2010) claim that storytelling is a useful instrument which is frequently applied to communicate the values of a brand. However, research in this specific area is still limited.

The elements of a valuable story used for storytelling will be outlined as they serve as the guidelines to chose storytelling commercials for this research. Firstly, a story in the context of storytelling follows the apparent structure of a conventional story, meaning that it has a beginning, middle and an end (Fog et al., 2010; Kent, 2015). Within this structure the plot should contain a “climax, denouement, or resolution” (Kent, 2015, p. 482) that solves the conflict, which is essential for a good story (Fog et al., 2010). It is crucial that interest is generated from the start of the story and that the message is evident (Lundqvist et al., 2012). Typical characters of a story include a hero, an adversary who operates against the hero and a person that

supports the hero (Fog et al., 2010). Moreover it is essential that heroes, villains, settings and other schemes are chosen with which the spectator can identify, as this is crucial to achieve resonance (Kent, 2015; Fog et al., 2010). Further characteristics of a favourable story are an obvious plot and an attractive setting (Kent, 2015).

In the discipline of public relations, Kent (2015) applies the “master plots” developed by Tobias (1993) to distinguish stories used for storytelling. A plot can be described as “the main events of a novel, movie, play, etc., and is arranged in a particular way by a writer” (Kent, 2015, p. 284). It is a sequence of events, which are linked to one another (Kent, 2015). The “master plots” can be a useful instrument to categorize stories.

Good stories should be universal as this allows for targeting a large number of people with different cultural backgrounds. As discussed above, designing a story in a way that it addresses and evokes emotions within the audience’s minds is essential for a compelling story. Hence, a good story causes the viewers to feel something and to react like to laugh or to cry (Baker, 2009). Relevance is a further criterion in the sense that a good story makes the recipient learn new things about him or herself and about the world in general. Finally, it is crucial that a story entertains the audience as this demerges its defence mechanism, which increases the probability that the message is remembered (Baker, 2009).

The literature review reveals that there is currently a lack of frameworks, which define the components of a good story and provide applicable criteria to measure the quality of a story in practice.

Brand Values

Practitioners and academics have a reasonable and repetitive thoughts regarding the way that a brand's centre qualities ought to be not very many and thoroughly considered words containing importance about what the organization remains for (Kapfer-

er, 2012). The centre qualities distinguish the brand and are typical of the brand and all that it remains for (Smolicz, 2010).

It is vital for the association behind the brand to know these centre values all around and to incorporate these in all part of their organization and system (Kapferer, 2012). By having strong core values a brand can increase their number of loyal customers. Since the core values are speaking to the solidness of the organization, this prompts clients with certainty having the capacity to suspect the brand's execution. Along these lines it is imperative for an organization to have clear core values and that these are accessible for everybody, not solely for the workers or other individuals associated with the organization, yet the clients should be guaranteed of what the brand remains for and what qualities are essential for the brand (de Chernatony, McDonald & Wallace, 2011). It is stated that storytelling is an effective method to communicate the brand values, both internally to employees and externally to consumers (Lundqvist et al., 2012; Fog et al., 2010). The core values ought to mirror the brand identity and work as a method for depicting the brand's most profound objectives, the brand's identity should be moulded by the centre values, and be there as a format both internally and externally. If environmental responsibility is one of the core values for a company, then attributes such as "dependable" or "responsible" could possibly be a few of the words describing the brand's identity. It is imperative that a brand's core values run as an inseparable unit with the identity that is depicted (Keller & Richey, 2006).

Emotions

Researchers have throughout the years had diverse perspectives on emotions and the significance of them. Some argue that emotions are an unnecessary concept and do not influence the audience's behaviour. For example Duffy (1962) argues that activation and arousal are what affects our behaviour and not necessarily our feelings.

Others contend that feelings are especially associated with our behaviour, however that it is disturbing and disordering our behaviour as opposed to helping us make relevant decisions (Arnould, 1960; Lazarus, 1968). There are also those who believe the opposite and think that emotions are helping us "organizing, motivating, and sustaining behaviour" (Izard, 1971; Tomkins, 1962; Rapaport, 1942). The researchers of this study have chosen the later in trusting that emotions are a key to some portion of our behaviour and that emotions can clarify certain activities.

According to Wright (2006) emotions can sometimes be what stimulated a purchaser's attitude towards a brand. Research has demonstrated that emotions assume a critical part with regards to persuading somebody to purchasing an item. As much as 75% in the acquiring of an item has to do with the clients sentiments towards that brand and the particular item being bought. Loewenstein and Lerner (2003) argue that there are two types of emotions; expected emotions and immediate emotions. The immediate emotions are the ones affecting the decision making process.

A brand or a product makes the consumer interested if they affect their emotions immediately. It can for example make the customers feel important, part of a group, loved, nostalgic, sad and so on. This makes emotions an essential tool for a brand with regards to promoting and marketing their items (Wright, 2006).

Methodology

Since the research, within this study's field of interest, is limited there are no existing frameworks to be used regarding examining storytelling in relation to brand values. As this study aims to explore how the phenomenon is perceived, a qualitative research approach has been used. Because of the literary limitations, the qualitative data collections have enabled the authors to create new theory and in accordance with

Morgan and Krueger (1993) focus groups is a favourable approach. This since the aim is to understand how people perceive brand's commercials. According to Krueger and Casey (2014) a focus group provides the researcher with a better understanding about people's feelings and thoughts about a specific issue or idea, in this case more specifically; a brand. This enables an interpretative approach and comparison of different opinions, perceptions and patterns among the participants (Bryman, 2012).

Initially, while conducting the study, the authors randomly selected a sample of 50 commercials produced by international brands and from this sample 25 were identified as containing storytelling as an integrated part of the commercials structure. Further on the sample was categorized into themes, based on various feelings and emotions that were portrayed in the com-

mercials. The emotions that were found within the sample were: *happiness, sadness, love, desire, excitement, loneliness* and *hope*. When attempting to limit down the selection of commercials in order to test them in the focus groups, the chosen categories and emotions were not as strong and not as clearly visible as the researchers had wished for. The final sample contained five commercials, from different brands, fulfilling the criteria of having a clear story to communicate, emotional aspects and was operating in the United States. The reason to why this study solely examines brands in the United States is because of the commercials' similarities in culture and language, which can be interpreted for a wide range of nationalities. The five selected commercials are from Coca-Cola, Under Armour, Guinness, AT&T and Extra. These are explained more extensively in the following part of the article, along

Categorization of Commercials

Brand	Commercial	Categorization Emotions	Communication of Brand Values
Airbnb	Wall and chain: A story of breaking down walls	hope	yes
AT&T	It can wait	sadness	yes
Care Norway	Dear daddy	sadness	yes
Carlsberg	If Carlsberg did haircuts	happiness	no
Coca Cola	Brotherly love	happiness	yes
Edeka	Weihnachten (Christmas)	sadness	no
Extra	The story of Sarah & Juan	love	yes
Guinness	Empty chair	hope	yes
Guinness	Wheelchair basketball	love	yes
Google	Reunion	love	yes
Hardees	BBQ's best pair	desire	no
Heineken	Fridge	happiness	no
Heineken	Orange your world Rio	happiness	yes
Hombach	Sag es mit deinem Projekt (Say it with your project)	love	yes
ICA	Ulf's BFF	happiness	no
John Lewis	Monty the pengiun	sadness	no
Mercedes-Benz	The journey	loneliness	no
Nike	Unlimited you	excitement	yes
Sainsbury's	Christmas advert 2014	hope	yes
Snickers	Mr Bean	happiness	no
Toyota	Corolla - feels good inside	sadness	no
Under Armour	Rule yourself Michael Phelps	excitement	yes
Procter&Gamble	Thank you mom	love	yes
Volkswagen	The force	happiness	no
Volvo	Made by Sweden	loneliness	yes

Figure 1

with a table of how the brands were categorized (see Figure 1).

The focus groups consisted of a sample size with a total of ten voluntary participants, which were divided into two groups of five. In accordance with Millward (1995) the focus groups contained a smaller group of participants to encourage engagement and creating a more intimate setting for the group discussions, rather than following Merton, Fiske and Kendall's (1990) recommendation of forming groups with six to twelve participants. Both groups included participants with different nationalities and genders, at ages 21-26, so the study would be able to gather opinions from a wide range of personalities. Since the focus groups were to discuss and reflect upon commercials, the interpretation is universal and the sample does not require a basis of similar experiences and cultural background.

The main purpose with the focus groups was to examine the participants' thoughts regarding the five selected brands and the commercials representing them. Before watching the commercials, the participants were asked to discuss how they perceive each brand and identify the supposed brand values. Thereafter the participants were to discuss and reflect upon the content of the commercials and how they perceived them. The questions asked during the focus groups were semi-structured research questions, which enabled different ways of interpret the questions rather than to control the outcome (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

To compile the results and create a foundation for analysis, the focus groups have been recorded and transcribed in detail to be used for a profound content analysis (Millward, 1995). The authors have searched for patterns, differences and possible explanations of the participants' perceptions of the brands and how their commercials can be understood.

Studied Brands

Coca-Cola

Coca-Cola is arguably one of the most well known brands in the world today, and according to Coca-Cola (2016) 94% of the world's population recognized the red & white logo. Coca-Cola as a brand is frequently associated with happiness, and the name Coca-Cola actually means "delicious happiness" in Mandarin (Bhasin, 2011). The mission statement of the company is "To refresh the world in mind, body and spirit. To inspire moments of optimism through our brands and actions. To create value and make a difference everywhere we engage". When it comes to the brand's values they are: *Creativity, Optimism, Passion and Fun* (Coca-Cola, 2016).

The picked commercial is called "Brotherly Love". This is a widespread tale around a relationship between two siblings. It is a story about adoration and struggle and Coca-Cola will at last unite the two siblings. The plot depends on the most youthful brother being bullied and the older brother venturing up for him. At last the Coca-Cola speaks to an image for their get-together and their brotherhood (Coca-Cola, 2016).

Under Armour

As reported by Under Armour (2016), the sports clothing brand was founded in 1995 by a former football coach Kevin Plank. His goal was to develop a next generation T-shirt that could keep athletes "cool, dry, and light" during strenuous training conditions. Today Under Armour is one of the leading brands in the world when it comes to athletic clothing and with the mission to "make all athletes better through passion, design, and the relentless pursuit of innovation". The core values for the brand are: *Innovation, Inspiration, Reliability and Integrity* (Under Armour, 2016).

The name of the chosen Under Armour commercials is "Rule Yourself". The primary character of the story is the swimmer

Michael Phelps, who is one of the front figures for Under Armour. The commercial was one of the most spoken of before the 2016 Olympics and has over 11 million views on YouTube (Under Armour, 2016). The story takes the viewer through the swimmers incredibly intense training and paints the diligent work it takes to become successful (Under Armour, 2016).

Guinness

Guinness (2016) states that the well-known Irish beer brand was created 1759, and has from that point forward become a stand out amongst the most successful beer companies in the world. Guinness is regularly connected with Ireland, where it is the best selling alcoholic beverage. However, the beer is brewed in over 60 countries and available in over 120. The core brand values building the company are: *Power, Communion and Goodness* (Guinness, 2016).

For the Guinness brand the researchers chose a commercial named “The Empty Chair”. The commercial was released in the United States on 4th of July, their Independence Day (Guinness, 2016), and is portraying strong emotions, such as hope and belonging. The story plot centres on a local bar where the owner holds a special chair for somebody. This person is appeared to be a soldier who at last returns home and is welcomed back by everyone at the bar. The commercial can be interpreted as a tribute to those fighting for independence and freedom, and in addition the families who have a loved one serving overseas (Guinness, 2014).

AT&T

AT&T is an American telecommunications company and one of the largest providers for mobile telephone services in the United States according to AT&T (2016). Brown (2015) states that AT&T was positioned number 6 in the world on the rundown of the world’s most profitable brands in 2015. The mission statement of AT&T is “Connecting people with their world, every-

where they live and work, and do it better than anyone else”, and their brand core values are: *Innovating, Inspiring, and Passionate* (AT&T, 2016).

The plot of this commercial depends on two separate stories. The primary story is a mother and her daughter driving to school, and the second is a man on the phone with his wife while driving a car. As the story develops the viewer begins to comprehend that something terrible is going to happen. The mother’s phone begins buzzing and as she looks down on her phone she collides with the man’s car (AT&T, 2015).

Extra

The chewing gum brand Extra is a part of the Wrigley brand and was launched in 1984 conforming to (Protobrand, 2016). It was one of the first brands to utilize high-intensity sweeteners in chewing gum, which made the flavour last longer, and therefore quickly became one of the most popular chewing gums available. Today Extra is one of the most well known gums in the world and are operating in over 180 countries, and are portraying brand values such as *Happy Life, Social Connection, and Joy* (Protobrand, 2016).

The commercial chosen for Extra is a romantic story called “The Story of Sarah & Juan”. The viewer gets to follow the couple from the day they meet until the day Juan proposes to Sarah. The story includes a constant sharing of Extra chewing gum and the viewer gets the feeling of Extra always being there, through all stages in life (Extra, 2015). As stated by Cobo (2015) the commercial got popular very quickly and had 78 million views on Facebook the first week.

Research results

Coca-Cola

The answers with respect to sentiments and feelings towards Coca-Cola were joined through all members of the focus groups. While interfacing Coca-Cola to specific

sentiments and feelings the members mentioned words such as happiness, friendship, lifestyle, and togetherness. The brand's values were predicted to be freedom, superior, American lifestyle, and happiness.

Subsequent to viewing the commercial the members clarified their emotions while watching with words, for example, fellowship, bliss, compassion, and love. Some participants believed the commercial to portray a fake picture of real life and for being "too American" in the sense of always adding a happy ending to a story. The sort of story was not expected and it was settled upon the way that Coca-Cola more often than not concentrates more on happy commercials, instead of one with a more genuine message. The groups stated that the brand values depicted were caring, sharing, family, support, and togetherness.

Under Armour

Before viewing the commercial the members' thoughts about the brand were that it was a great quality product, a performance oriented, and inspirational brand with expected core values such as athletic, functional, quality, and high performance.

The reflections with respect to the brand in the wake of viewing the commercial were comparative among members. The message was said to be "anything is possible" and the viewers described the commercials with feelings such as excitement, respect, confidence, loneliness, inspiring and sentimental. The groups did not think that the commercials showed were a typical sports clothing commercial and that it had unique features such as intensity and strong emotions. After viewing the commercial the brand values were thought of as motivation, inspiration, hard working, not giving up, and giving your best.

Guinness

The thoughts and comments about Guinness before watching the commercial was that it is a brand with a strong Irish heritage. Comments such as masculinity, beard, pubs, tradition and sports watching reoc-

curred. A common thought was that Guinness is an exclusive and exotic brand that is not available for everyone. For the brand values the group listed heritage, community, Irish and tradition.

Feelings and emotions brought up after watching the commercial included sadness, exclusivity, and not feeling part of the Guinness society.

The participants agreed that a typical Guinness commercial is happy and loud, and that this commercial contradicted those attributes and had a sad plot relative to the brand itself.

Brand values were thought of as being connected to tradition, belonging and community. The participants interpreted the message of the commercial being that Guinness is a unique beer, which is not for everyone, but for special people. Guinness is portrayed as an exclusive brand and the message should suggest that consumers drinking Guinness belong to an exclusive group.

AT&T

In relation to AT&T the participants had positive comments as for instance market leader, biggest and best in its category. However, a few negative comments were spoken such as that nobody likes phone-carriers, and they do not have a good external image. Speculations about AT&T's brand values were related to connecting people, being up to date, fast, first, quality and innovation.

The feelings from the groups toward the commercial shown were relatively strong. Some participants took offense to the emotional and scary story, as they stated that they do not want to see a commercial that evokes such negative feelings. Meanwhile others expressed feelings such as sadness and hopelessness. It was widely agreed that the story made the participants reflect about their own behaviour and that applying shock and sadness are good measures to prevent them from such behaviour in the future. Everyone believed that the chosen

commercial was unexpected from the category the brand is in.

The only value portrayed in the commercial was agreed in both groups to be responsibility. Some participants stated that the commercial convinced them that AT&T was a responsible company. This is because it uses advertising to raise awareness for the issue rather than applying advertising to promote the company or its products.

Extra

Before watching the commercial comments about Extra were that it is refreshing, long lasting and hygienic. All participants had a favourable image of Extra and believed that the characteristics mentioned above set them apart from competitors. The specific brand values for Extra were accepted to be words like health, clean, trust, fresh.

Feelings towards the commercial were united and included in the following words: emotional, dreamy, romantic and desire, but also slightly over the top and unrealistic. Some participants thought it was one of the best commercials they had ever seen, while others thought it was cheesy and unrealistic. However, even one participant who found it unrealistic admitted that the story would touch people because it is a story of which everybody secretly hopes that it will happen to them as well.

The participants mostly agreed that the commercial touched their feelings. They stated that the link between such a story and a chewing gum brand was unclear.

The expected brand values after watching the commercial were trust, confidence and reliability.

Analysis

Before being exposed to the different brand commercials, the supposed brand values and the participants' perceptions of

the brands varied. The participants were not able to identify the stated values in either brand, except for Coca-Cola where the understanding was towards happiness. A possible explanation for this may be that Coca-Cola is the most recognized brand among the sample, with a history of portraying happiness within their promotional activities, including their declared usage of storytelling in their marketing strategies (Pulizzi, 2012a; Puig, 2016). The supposed brand values had an orientation and associations towards product attributes and what the product itself represents, rather than a clear connection to the brand behind it. Instead of receiving information about the brand the participants of the study related the values and communication directly onto the product attributes, which can be argued to be both an advantage and disadvantage. The outcome testifies that the brand has been able to give the product a clear position within the customer's mind, which is an advantage, but the product has taken a larger part in the positioning than the brand as a whole. The latter can therefore be said to be a disadvantage, with no further connections to the brand's values.

The results from the focus groups show that there are similar patterns of how the two groups interpreted the commercials. There was a homogeneous perception of the storytelling the brands communicated in their commercials and a similarity among which emotions were evoked within the participants. Regarding the storytelling and key message in the different commercials, Coca-Cola was perceived as a reliant and desirable product that creates memories and brings people together; Under Armour portrayed and communicated that nothing is impossible; and Extra's storyline reflected a sense of belonging and being loved. What is in common for these three brands is that the emotional aspects are based on positive feelings and evoked pleasant emotions for the participants. The key messages from the other two commercials were identified as follows. The plot of the story lead to Guinness being perceived

as traditional and creating belonging, with a feeling of reliability. At the same time it conveyed exclusivity to belong to a selected group of people. AT&T's story was a clear message of "do not use your telephone while driving". The two latter communicate feelings that negatively associated and evoked emotions such as sadness and shock. As earlier mentioned, this study is based on a belief that emotions will motivate purchase decisions. Therefore the evoked feelings from the commercials play an important role for customers in the process of interpreting a brand and evaluate its core essence, this to be able to understand it and relate it as a necessity in the customer's everyday life.

The results of the participants' perceptions, regarding the brand values, changed after watching the commercials compared to the initial answers. While watching and reflecting upon the message being portrayed, various brand values were identified and coherent with the actual stated values of the brands. The brands where the participants were most successful in determining the values were Coca-Cola, Under Armour and Extra. The values that were identified in Under Armour's commercial were almost identical with the company's own words. In addition to this, the commercial was the one evoking the strongest emotions among the participants. On the other hand, the participants were also able to identify the essence and some of the core values from Coca-Cola and Extra. Even though there were positive emotions portrayed, and the participants understood the commercials' key message, the emotions were perceived as to be imaginary and exaggerated and were not able to capture the participant's interest in the way as Under Armour's commercial did.

In the case of Guinness and AT&T, the participants experienced intensely negative emotions. Despite of the strong emotional reaction, the reaction was directed to the message and images the brand displayed rather to the brand itself and the partici-

pants were not able to identify any of the values the brand represents. In this particular case, the authors of this study have interpreted the results as the emotions of the commercial were overpowering the key message. Therefore the viewer cannot directly relate what has been communicated to the essence of the brand.

Findings and Discussion

As explained in the aim and methodology the first step of the research was carried out in order to explore how storytelling is used in practice. From this it can be concluded that some commercials declared as containing storytelling, do not fulfil the criteria as explained in the literature review. Frequently, the reason for this is that commercials evoking emotions are described as storytelling, however they can not be classified as storytelling as they lack the typical structure and plot of a good story. The finding is thus that the term storytelling is frequently used in practice to describe commercials, however there is no uniform understanding of what storytelling describes. This is why the concept is sometimes misused.

The analysis of the 25 storytelling commercials (see figure 1) reveals that commonly used themes of the stories include friendship and family relationships. The most important factor that determines the examples as strong storytelling is that substantial emotions among the audience are evoked. These finding supports the point identified in the literature review that emotions are an essential determinant of a compelling story (Baker, 2009).

A further goal in the analysis of the 25 commercials was to get an overview and find patterns how companies apply storytelling to communicate their brand's values. It was found that, some brands have good stories but neither a clear message, nor a thematic connection between the story and the brand or product could be found. It is reasoned that these brands ap-

ply storytelling because of its benefits in comparison to generic advertising. But that the potential of storytelling is not fully exploited due to the lack of a link to the brand and often also lack of a clear message. Other brands use storytelling to communicate product benefits. Furthermore, it was observed that some brands use storytelling to portray an advertising message rather than brand values. Finally, there are the brands, which have storytelling commercials where the brand values are clearly conveyed. Based on these observations two categories are distinguished: stories where brand values are communicated and stories where they are not communicated (see Figure 1).

These findings should provide useful insights into the current application of storytelling in practice.

When selecting the commercials for the focus groups the researchers determined that they all contained reasonable storytelling content, judged based on the criteria outlined in the literature review. This has been confirmed in the focus groups. It has not only been observable that the participants showed strong emotional reactions, but they also verbally expressed this. Thus the audience's perspective acknowledged the claim made by academics that storytelling has potential to evoke emotions.

Regarding this it has been noticed in the focus groups that stories evoking positive feelings (Coca Cola, 2016; Extra, 2015; Under Armour, 2016) trigger favourable reactions of the audience. The commercials using rather negative feelings (AT&T, 2014; Guinness, 2014), such as sadness, left the viewers thoughtful. In the case of the AT&T (2014) commercial some participants even showed adverse reactions and stated that they would not want to see these kinds of commercials.

As concluded from the analysis of the commercials the link of the stories to brand values differ in strength. This finding has been confirmed by the results from the focus groups. For the commercials, which

contain rather strong links between the story its message and the brand values, these links have been recognized by the viewers (Under Armour, 2016). One factor facilitating that this connection is being made is that the message is clearly stated so that it is easy to understand (e.g. AT&T, 2014; Under Armour, 2016). The research shows that the audience needs time to reflect to understand the message of a commercial when the message is portrayed in a more indirect way (Guinness, 2014). This bears the risk that viewers do not take time for interpretation and hence do not understand the message.

For the Coca-Cola (2016) commercial the story was obvious and easy to understand and hence the audience was able to derive the brand values portrayed.

In commercials where the story does not obviously match with the brand and the brand values are not clearly depicted according to the researchers, also the focus groups were not able to recognize a connection (Guinness, 2014; AT&T, 2014). The participants stated that they did not see an obvious connection between the story and the brand. This could be due to the negative emotions applied, but external effects, such as an unclear message, can not be excluded.

Conclusion

From the literature review it is concluded that academic research on how storytelling is used to portray brand values is lacking. Storytelling is a concept frequently mentioned by practitioners, but this study revealed that only few brands create truly compelling storytelling commercials. The findings include that there are commercials including storytelling, which do communicate brand values, but there are also commercials which do not. It was further found that the potential of storytelling to convey brand values is not fully exploited in practice, as some brands that apply storytelling do not establish a connection between the story, its message and the brand values.

The qualitative research on the consumer's perspective when watching a commercial showed that storytelling can elicit strong emotional reactions within the viewers. Thereby, the audience sees positive emotions as more favourable than negative ones. With regard to the expression of brand values research validates that viewers are able to identify the brand values communicated by a storytelling commercial. The success of this is dependent on how clearly the values are illustrated in the commercial and how well the story is linked to the brand.

It can be concluded that storytelling is an appropriate instrument to communicate brand values as the study on the consumer perspective revealed that the viewer is able to identify the brand values expressed.

Managerial implications

Based on the findings of the study it is recommended to practitioners to apply storytelling in advertising for their brands due to its capability to effectively trigger consumers emotions. Attention is proposed when addressing negative feelings because they can lead to adverse reactions among the viewers. If suitable positive emotions should be preferred. Furthermore, it is recommended to convey a clear message and establish a connection between the story, the brand and its values in order to make sure the values are understood by the audience.

Research Limitations and Further Recommendations

The main critique that can be taken into consideration is that the selected commercials do not represent a variety of cultural diversity among the chosen brands since they are all recognized brands sold in similar countries. Also linked to the chosen commercials is the relatively small sample size of five commercials that has been tested in the focus groups. Another impediment would be that they were all from the

United States. This limitation regards to different nationalities and conceivable contrasts in regards to advertisements and commercials in different parts of the world. Different restrictions with respect to the focus groups are associated with that the results of the study depends on a relatively small sample size of two focus groups and consisting of a total of ten people.

This research made a contribution to the research gap in storytelling by first providing an overview how brands apply storytelling in commercials and examining to what extent they communicate brand values. Further research could explore this with a bigger sample size in order to get more reliable data and draw better conclusions about how storytelling is used in practice. This could be used to validate the three categories of storytelling usage explained in the findings. Studies focusing on the perspective of companies and their statements about the topic could add an insightful different perspective. Further research to carry on the qualitative study is recommended with a higher number of participants to validate the findings. The study could be taken further by testing commercials from different countries to discover cultural similarities and differences. This study could lie the foundation for the development of a quantitative study to generate more valid data.

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