

THE
STRATEGIC BRAND MANAGEMENT:
MASTER PAPERS

SBM

STRATEGIC BRAND MANAGEMENT

MASTER PAPERS

Seventh Edition

Student Papers

2021
September - October

Strategic Brand Management: Master Paper

The Strategic Brand Management: Master Papers is essential reading for brand strategists in both private and public sector organisations, and academics in universities and business schools.

The papers are written by master student groups and follow an international journal format. The student groups selected the topics of their papers and provided updated and relevant insights into the strategic management of brands.

The mission of Strategic Brand Management: Master Papers is to “present and develop useful tools and theories for the application in practice of managing brands, and to forward the academic field of strategic brand management.”

The intent of the series is to bridge the gap between academic teaching and research.

The series is a result of co-creation between students and teachers in the course Strategic Brand Management (BUSN21 – 7.5 University Credit Points; 8 weeks 50% study time), part of the master program International Marketing and Brand Management at Lund School of Economics and Management, Sweden. The published papers represent the result of the intellectual work of students under supervision of the heads of course. The content of the papers is to be read as student reports albeit the journal format. The papers are free to download and should be cited following international conventions.

Editors

Mats Urde
Associate Professor

Frans Melin
Assistant Professor

Heads of master course Strategic Brand Management (BUSN21), part of master program International Marketing and Brand Management.
Lund School of Economics and Management

How weird elements in brand communication can strengthen brand intimacy

Yingting Zhang, Francesco Carlino & Undine Himmelsbach

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to explore “weird elements” as part of brand communication in relation to brand intimacy. To define the purpose more precisely, this paper will focus on four specific research questions with reference to the selected case examples:

1. Which message is conveyed?
2. What was the initial intention behind this kind of advertisement?
3. Which creative elements/ means of rhetoric come to play?
4. What is the expected result from the company’s perspective?

Methodology: This paper adopts a qualitative research method with secondary research exploring three different cases of brand advertisements that include unusual and surprising elements. The selected case examples with brand advertising videos from Absolut Vodka, HORNBACH and Heinz Ketchup are explored with reference to the research questions mentioned above.

Findings: The findings of the research demonstrate that incorporating unexpected and “weird” elements in brand advertising represent a potential tool to strengthen both brand identity and brand intimacy. As a result of the case analyses a framework is concluded depicting the relation between incorporating “weird” or unpredictable elements in advertisements and the added level of brand intimacy.

Research limitations: The overall limitation to this paper is little reliability due to time-constraints that did not allow in-depth empirical investigation into the phenomenon of “weird” brand communication. Furthermore, the small sample size of cases is likely not representative.

Managerial implications: The proposed framework aids the demonstration of divergent elements in advertising in relation to brand intimacy. It also assists a company in determining its position on the “weird” scale and to reveal if the communicated messages align with the brand’s values and personality. The framework is also useful to decide about the direction a company wants to follow within creative branding i.e., to which degree the firm wants to integrate unexpected elements into its communication strategy, and which outcomes are desired.

Originality/value: So far, very limited research within strategic brand management covers the phenomenon of “weird”, unexpected elements in brand communication. Therefore, this paper aims to fill a gap in research by providing a framework that explains the interrelationship between unexpected elements in brand advertising and brand intimacy.

Keywords: Brand Communication, Advertisement, Brand Identity, Brand Personality, Elements of Weirdness, Elements of Surprise, Brand Rejuvenation, Brand Positioning, Brand Intimacy, Brand Rhetoric.

Paper type: Research paper

Introduction

In times of accelerating speed in technological innovations along with increasingly globalised markets, consumer tastes are bound to change in record speed. With higher purchasing powers and more sophisticated demands than ever before, consumers no longer play passively along but actively shape brand communication (Kapferer, 2012).

As a consequence, brand managers nowadays are challenged to constantly reinvent and adapt their brand positioning to the pulse of time so as to stay under the radar in a highly competitive marketplace (Kapferer, 2012). Not surprisingly, the most frequent question that companies face is how to cut through the white noise and to position themselves in the market to attract relevant consumers. As a matter of fact, it is no longer enough to maintain relevance but much more to stand apart from a sheer abundance of branded products (Kapferer, 2012). Nevertheless, in order to catch the audience's awareness, brand managers are compelled to conceive of brand messages deliberately designed to go beyond normative ways of storytelling (Porter, 2019). These are likely to entail associations such as "weird", "humoristic", "crazy", "unexpected" or "deviant". However, in the process of developing such out-of-the-line advertisements it is critical to stay true to a company's core and brand ethos and not get lost along the way of trying to be different (Porter, 2019). As the phenomenon of "unexpected" brand communication is rooted in a brand's identity and its positioning, this paper will initially provide a theoretical context.

With the help of three examples - namely Absolut Vodka, HORNBACH and Heinz Ketchup - this paper will examine the phenomenon of incorporating "weird" elements in brand commercials and shed light on the four research questions mentioned earlier in the Abstract.

Furthermore, this paper intends to analyse "unexpected" brand advertising and its effect on strengthening brand intimacy. In the scope of this paper's case analysis, Kapferer's Pyramid Model of brand identity will be applied to the three selected brand advertisements of Absolut vodka, HORNBACH and Heinz Ketchup respectively to gain a holistic understanding of what characterises their distinct brand communication.

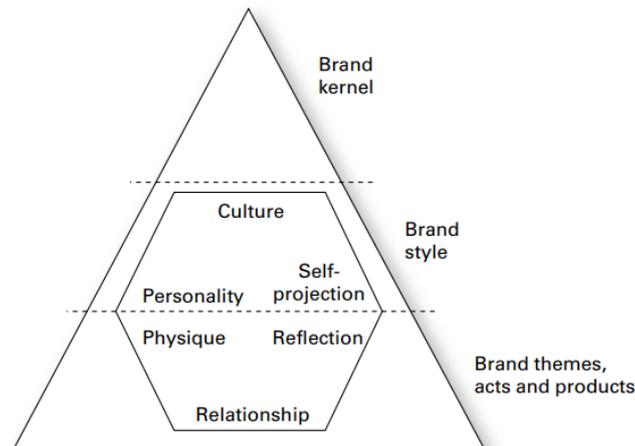
Furthermore, this paper will contribute an extended version of Aaker's Brand Personality framework, arguing that an additional dimension to the model is necessary to comprehend where "weird" brand advertising can be located on the scale of brand personality.

It is essential to mention at this point, that the terms "weird", "unexpected" and "divergent" in the context of brand communication will be used interchangeably throughout this paper.

Literature Review

Brand Identity

The concept of brand identity has evolved with the times and its important role has been constantly noted, thoroughly emphasised and repeatedly referred to in the context of fierce market competition. According to Kapferer (2012), society is changing in the last two decades with many new social conflicts and opportunities, creating opportunities for new, meaningful brands that must cultivate ideals that meet this new demand. Brands need to act as an ideology that goes beyond the product, that responds to a deeper need for meaning to resonate deeply within the core objectives of the brand. As a result, nowadays, in order to stand out from the competition and resist long-term change, companies are increasingly emphasizing the urgent need to develop a well-founded concept to reveal their "real self" (Karlsson et al., 2018).



Identity and Pyramid Model by Kapferer (2012)

Kapferer (2012) conceives that the development of every brand needs a consistent direction and vision to achieve effective communication and convey the right message to stakeholders. For this reason, it is essential to know what drives the brand, what are the main reasons for its existence in order to better manage a consistent identity in the future. Hence, Kapferer (2012) defined a close relationship between the various aspects of a brand's identity in the three levels of a pyramid. Sources of inspiration, statements, codes and communication themes work together in a three-tiered pyramid (Kapferer, 2012):

The brand kernel, located at the top of the pyramid represents the core of a brand and reflects the essence of brand identity. It sets forth the stable coherence and consistency for the brand. The middle layer of the pyramid deals with style norms, how the brand speaks and which images it uses. This layer reveals the internal dimension of the brand, its culture, its self-projection, its personality and its self-defined image. At the bottom of the pyramid is the thematic layer: the level that contains the brand's communication concept, its product positioning and product promise. They are the external aspects of identity, are explicit and lead to a tangible product.

The three levels of the pyramid model are interconnected and influence each other, helping visualizing the communication process between brand and customer.

Furthermore, the concept of different levels gives flexibility to brands that contain many products, allowing the brand to move seamlessly from one theme to another while maintaining a consistent genetic code. Those essential elements are indispensable for the brand identity (Kapferer, 2012).

What it means to be weird as a brand

Before exploring the concept of weird more in depth, it is necessary to explain what lies behind this term with reference to brand advertising. First of all, it is important to note that weird is a subjective perception influenced by an individual's socialization and cultural environment of up-bringing (Porter, 2019). More often than not, brand advertising makes use of images that directly emanate from existing sets of societal values, narratives and beliefs (Randazzo, 2006). This is in fact the reason why advertisements as a strategic tool can cause considerable resonance and appeal amongst the respective target audience. However, what is perceived as weird or "strange" to some might be received as rather "disturbing" or "scary" to others (Porter, 2019). Therefore, it is critical for brand managers to conduct prior research about the suitability of their brand messages, especially when planning to incorporate creative elements that likely challenge and stretch the audience's tolerance levels to a wide extent (Randazzo, 2006).

There is a set of characteristics that weirdness invariably incorporates. First of all, it entails something unexpected that is typically different from initial speculations, therefore subsequently provoking a moment of surprise (Porter, 2019). Secondly, weird essentially is expressive in nature, as it is a way to get across creative ideas that reflect opinions and stories (Porter, 2019). However, as mentioned before, what might be perceived as weird in the positive sense by some, can meet rejection with others, which consequently makes this form of “otherness” as something risky to follow in branding. Nevertheless, taking the risk of being weird as a brand simultaneously promotes something imperfect or flawed and is therefore seen as more authentic and humanly (Porter, 2019).

As a concluding fact, the very act of designing “unexpected” brand advertising can be perceived as a balancing act of utilizing surprising elements that are unusual in nature but not too unusual as to overstep a line.

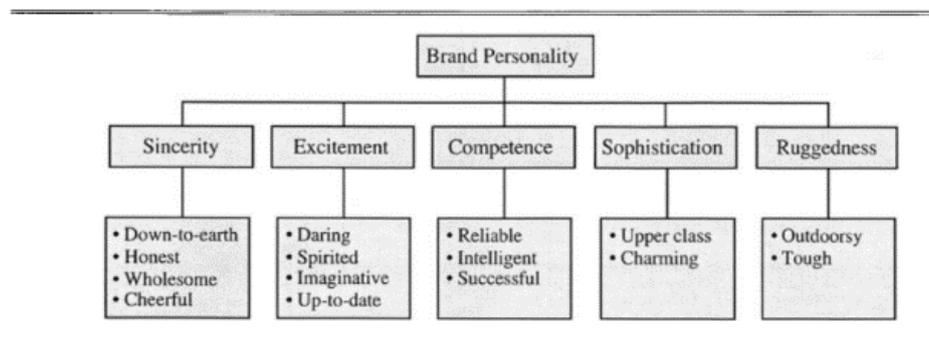
The Aaker Model of Brand Personality

In order to understand the underlying principles of weird branding it is necessary to examine where it is rooted in the overall scheme of brand personality. In 1997, Aaker defined brand personality as “*the set of human characteristics associated with a brand*” (Aaker, 1997, p. 347) and conceptualised a theoretical framework of

brand personality, as a first approach to comprehend the intangible nature of brands. According to here, there can be differentiated five personality dimensions – namely *sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness*. Based on this approach, brands can be conceived of as having a “personality” that is characterised by different properties. However, this must not be literally confused with the personality of humans in psychology, but rather referred to as a metaphor (Aaker & Fournier, 1995).

The underlying purpose of this so-called “brand personality scale” (BPS) is to conceptualize and measure brand personality with reference to consumer behaviour (Aaker, 1997). Due to the fact that brands are often thought of as celebrities or popular figures, they are easily permeated with human personality traits, therefore propelling the symbolic use of brands using techniques of “anthropomorphisation” and “personification” (Aaker, 1997). Consequently, it is not surprising that the success of brands ultimately stems from its relatable character that is portrayed into the consumer’s minds.

As a matter of fact, this connection of brands with personality traits is the key to what makes brand personality so persistent and pronounced, enabling an effective differentiation from competitors (Aaker, 1997).



Brand Personality Framework by Aaker (1997)

*Creative elements and brand rhetoric
(weird as a value-adding element to brand
equity)*

Much research has been conducted to define and develop the concept of creativity, especially in relation to advertising (Ang et al., 2007). Today developing successful and effective commercials represents one of the biggest goals for companies (Frank, 2009), as it has been proven that creative ads can generate a competitive advantage in different ways. For instance, one way a creative commercial could bring to a substantial competitive advantage is by increasing brand recall (Till & Baack, 2005). Therefore, in the past few decades many theories and definitions have tried to better explain the link between those two elements, to help companies increase aspects such as brand awareness and customer involvement through creative advertising.

When referring to creativity, many research identify two main components: divergence, which is the ability to produce something atypical and unexpected, and relevance, which states how meaningful one's communication is perceived from both internal and external stakeholders (Smith & Yang, 2004). Divergence could be considered the most crucial one when defining creativity, even though companies should focus on the relationship between both elements (Smith et al., 2008). Relevance, or "meaningfulness", although extremely important for an ad effectiveness, it is not a substantial part of creativity (Lehnert et al., 2014). In fact, an ad is creative when it successfully deviates from the common ground (Lehnert et al., 2014). While the majority of research agree that divergence is the driving component of creativity, there is still a debate on the role of meaningfulness in judging one's advertisement creative value (Lehner et al., 2014). According to Ang & Low (2000) a commercial cannot be defined as creative if it does not contain a meaning or a message. Completely opposite views are the ones that believe that relevance has nothing to do

with creativity, and just divergence is a factor (Till & Baack, 2005), or those who analyze relevance exclusively related to brand-customer relations (Lehner et al., 2014).

With that being said, the rest of the chapter will now focus on some of the main elements that define an ad divergent, on the relationship between ad divergence and consumer divergence as well as how Aristotle's rhetoric can play a part in effective communicational efforts.

The first element that makes an advertisement divergent is flexibility: the ability of a company to create something unexpected, unusual, something that deviates from a logical or traditional way of thinking (Smith & Yang, 2004). Having an unusual perspective upon a certain situation, an event or even in regards of the product features and functions can be extremely helpful to build awareness and saliency (Smith & Yang, 2004). Related to this first attribute is the concept of elaboration. A company should aim to weird, unusual, and radically unconventional elements to increase the ad complexity, to expand a basic idea into a more sophisticated concept (Smith et al., 2008). A second crucial component that constitutes ads' divergence is originality. An advertisement should try distance itself from the standard, by adding new and atypical elements (Smith et al., 2008). By relating elements commonly thought as unrelatable one to another, a company can effectively create a communication program that stands out from the competition (Smith & Yang, 2004). Lastly, humor has been said to play a crucial part in divergent advertisements. Smith & Yang (2004) states that a commercial should convey messages through weird and sometimes absurd elements, visual or conceptual, while using a humorous and playful tone. However, it is important to note that goofy and ridiculous ads can sometimes have a negative effect on the way a brand is perceived by the customers, especially if exaggerated (Smith & Yang,

2004). The combination and synergy of all these elements is what makes a commercial stick in customers' minds, catching people's attention and bring it towards the brand (Lehnert, 2014).

Within the field of psychology, the phenomenon of creative brand advertising can be explained by reasoning that whenever we find something new and intriguing, there is a force within any of us that pushes to understand more about the phenomenon. It is human nature; we want to know more about the world around us (Brown & Dryden, 2004).

But what about individuals? Do different individuals have a different degree of creativity and sensibility to divergence? How do consumers that do not value divergence react to highly absurd and weird ad propositions? To answer these questions, it might be useful to analyze an effect of divergence called "correspondence effect". The general principle behind this effect is that the higher the presence of ad divergence and the higher the consumer values such divergence, then the more favorable responses will present to an advertisement (Smith & Yang, 2004). If people value divergence as a value adding process, then weird and unconventional commercials will find themselves to be well received to the public. On the contrary, low levels of divergence within a certain segment might result in a negative response to a brand's communicational effort (Smith & Yang, 2004).

Brand Rhetoric is a theory that tries to explain how a brand can communicate efficiently and effectively with the environment, by adopting the 3 Aristotle's rhetoric perspectives: logos, ethos and pathos. Logos affects people's reason, ethos express personality to generate trust, while pathos aims to deliver emotions to the public (Urde, 2021). Effective advertisements should be able to convey a message that includes all these elements in order to better persuade the audience. It is therefore important to present arguments based on facts that explain the brand

(logos), arguments that build trust based on the companies' character and personality (ethos), and arguments that bring feelings and emotions to the audience (pathos) (Urde, 2021).

Brand Intimacy in relation to weird advertising

What sets brands apart is that weirdness creates an intimate relationship between the customer and the brand. It generates what we call brand intimacy (Porter, 2019). Ntarelli & Plapler (2017) indicates that there are four forms of intimacy, the most obvious one being the physical intimacy, the feeling of physical unity. Emotional intimacy occurs when two people feel understood and accepted sharing their feelings with each other. Intellectual intimacy, where ideas are shared in an inclusive way and feel connected intellectually. Experiential intimacy is a tacit understanding between each other that requires little verbal sharing of ideas or feelings. It is a sense of being a part of a special community, being in sync. When brands showcase their weird side and are authentic, they can somehow connect their customers emotionally and form an emotional connection. Because people can relate to the stories and emotions that brands express. Newbery & Farnham (2013) also agreed that when brands decide how to express themselves, they become a promise of what the company stands for, which creates a connection and a strong resonance when customers see themselves reflected in the brand. These emotional connections are at the heart of brand intimacy (Ntarelli & Plapler, 2017).

It is worth mentioning that from the point of view of consumer's purchase behaviour, due to the interaction of consumer personality and brand personality, consumers do not see brands as separate entities when choosing the brand that they consume. Instead, their purchase decisions are influenced by the personality of the company's brand (Banerjee, 2016). For managers, especially those targeting younger consumers, it is important to focus

on the behaviour of their brands and apply a new framework to consider the use of strange elements, as consumers seem to favour brands that are personal, exciting and unique, which consequently makes them more appealing for consumers to connect with (Japutra & Molinillo, 2019).

Methodology

Research Design

In light of the presented literature review, we argue that there is a theoretical gap in the current strategic brand management theory to explain the contribution of the element of weirdness to building brand identity and intimacy, especially considering the increasingly widespread use of the element of weirdness and unexpectedness in many creative advertisings.

Consequently, it was decided to conduct a case study of three companies using secondary data: *HORNBACH - The Smell of Spring*, *Absolut Vodka - Nothing to Hide*, *Heinz Ketchup – Wiener Stampede*. The three cases in this article all contain different types of advertising with weird, surprising and eye-catching elements. They have been chosen since they are closely linked to the identity of the brand. Moreover, the commercials were commercially effective and had a strong brand impact. Therefore, the case studies are focusing on explore "doing the unexpected" as part of brand identity and develop a new framework on the weird element in relation to the identity and intimacy of the brand, in this way we can provide new insights in the role of the strange element into brand identity for companies.

Using case studies has many benefits. First of all, case studies help us better understand the process by which a theory or strategy is adapted to the environment, since the researcher must observe and examine the data within the context of its use (Yin, 1984). Secondly, Zainal (2007) also argue that case studies can also explain the

complexity of real-life situations. When conducting case studies, we can understand the reasons for using strategies and how the use of these strategies relates to other strategies in ways that cannot be captured through experiments or survey research. Although case studies can be questionable due to sample size, they still allow researchers to examine data at the micro level. Providing better knowledge of the detailed behavior of the subject, especially in real-life research and social issues (Zainal, 2007).

In relation to the above, the aim of this research was to examine how three brands mentioned used the element of weirdness, surprise in their creative advertising to create a more distinct and relatable brand image. To greater understand the impact of the case on the brand identity, we resorted Identity and Pyramid Model - Kapferer (2012) to guide the evaluation. Once we have answered the following questions, the contribution and impact of the weird elements will be further clarified and assist to develop new framework.

1. Which message is conveyed?
2. What was the initial intention behind this kind of advertisement?
3. Which creative elements/ means of rhetoric come to play?
4. What is the expected result from the company's perspective?

Case Examples and Analysis

Case 1: HORNBACH - The Smell of Spring

An example of brand advertising that certainly incorporates weird or absurd elements is HORNBACH's campaign "The Smell of Spring" from 2019.

Founded in 1877, Hornbach is one of the leading German DIY-store chains to offer home improvement and do-it-yourself goods, with annual sales of Euro 5.5 billion in 2020/2021 (Hornbach, 2021). In a highly segmented market of home improvement

retailers in German-speaking countries, HORNBAACH is challenged by a crowded field of competition (Ramsenthaler, 2020). Meanwhile competing brands are primarily focusing on efficiency and pricing, HORNBAACH instead convinces with a distinctive brand profile and quirky commercials (Ramsenthaler, 2020). In fact, the company maintains a long-standing tradition of unconventional and emotion-laden commercials since the early 2000s, thereby maintaining a consistent brand heritage. A recurring theme in their brand messages is the do-it-yourself journey accompanied by an unusual twist.

1. Which message is conveyed?

In its TV commercial, Hornbach explicitly focuses on transmitting the “*longing for springtime*” (Hornbach Germany, 2021) in combination with addressing global urbanization and the decreasing number of green spaces. The clip transmits courageous and humorous as well as polarizing elements that accompany the gardening DIY project in a memorable way. Overall, it aims to evoke outdoor springtime nostalgia and intends to stimulate the audience’s desire to get started with their next home improvement project.

2. What was the initial intention behind kind of advertisement?

The promotional campaign primarily intends to strengthen the audience’s connection with HORNBAACH by stimulating the audience’s senses with strong audio-visual elements and quite literally bringing the scent of the garden to life it creates a sensation of outdoor nostalgia. Further, HORNBAACH aims at leveraging the “smell fetish” as a supposed taboo subject in a humorous way and thereby also putting a twist on well-spread gender stereotypes (Hornbach, 2021).

3. Which kind of creative elements/ means of rhetoric come to play?

As the title of the clip already suggests, the advertisement features the scent of spring in the primary role portrayed by sweaty

clothes from hardworking men in their garden. With an unexpected twist, that is when dubious scientists appear to collect the sweaty clothes into a container, the clip transitions to a futuristic city, where a young woman retrieves one vacuum-packed bag with a man’s shirt from a vending machine, and almost obsessively inhales the smell of this garden artifact. Overall, there is an emphasis on the sweat, facial expressions and heavy breathing sounds of the men, which intends to make the viewer feel immersed into heavy gardening work using HORNBAACH tools. The overall twist to the ad with the men taking off their sweaty clothes to be put in vacuum bags represents an unusual image of excitement about dirty and smelly shirts. A recurrent theme in the video is the usage of exaggerated contrasting elements (laboratory men dressed in white gowns expressing sterility vs. working sweaty men in muddy clothes; bright and blossoming garden environment vs. grey and monotonous urban city) which eventually instills a humorous effect. This is further enforced by the uses of stereotypes and unconventional ideas that leaves the viewers both surprised and wonderful. According to HORNBAACH the intention behind the men undressing was to reverse the typical gender clichés of women undressing (Hornbach, 2021). In terms of rhetoric, the ad makes use particularly of the ethos and pathos elements, while it serves less the logos perspective.

4. What is the expected result from the company’s perspective?

To address both male and female do-it-yourself enthusiasts with the passion to improve their home and garden, the commercial was broadcasted to audiences in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Switzerland, Romania and Slovakia (Hornbach Germany, 2021). The overall positive reactions to the commercial were accompanied by a lot of criticism from the eastern Asian region, due to the highly controversial portrayal of Asian women in combination with smell fetish (Hornbach

Germany, 2021). However, HORNBACH stated that it was never their intention to harm the Asian community but instead they stressed that it could have been any woman or man closing off the commercial and they deliberately chose to play with overly exaggerated stereotypes and “taboos” (Hornbach Germany, 2021).

Case 2 : Absolut Vodka - Nothing To Hide

Absolut is a globally renown company producing vodka based in Sweden. The brand has always developed innovative and creative marketing strategies to promote its products, such as print artworks of the Absolut Vodka bottle (referralcandy.com, 2017). The Absolut’s bottle rapidly became the symbol of the company and one of the kernel facets of the brand, thanks to major communication solutions revolving around the iconic bottle (smartinsights.com, 2017).

The *Nothing to hide* campaign, developed by BBH London and launched in 2018, is a clear example of how unexpectedness and divergence in advertising can bring value and saliency to a company’s communication strategy, conveying its values and its core identity to the public. With the commercial, Absolut decided to bring the audience behind the scenes of their traditional production process in Åhus, Sweden, through a tour of the factory, accompanied by naked workers. In the video, 28 real Absolut employees are shown completely naked working and dancing in wheat fields (digg.com, 2018).

1. Which message is conveyed?

Through the commercial Absolut wanted to communicate their promise (delivering a high quality and truthful product), by employing a humorous and funny approach. During the video, the host Gunnar explains the company’s efforts towards the environment, their sustainability culture, and their unique CO2 neutral distillation process (thedrum.com, 2018).

2. What was the initial intention behind kind of advertisement?

At first, Absolut developed the spot for inter-organizational use, to communicate its main promise and core values to its internal stakeholders and newly recruited staff. Since the ad was a success straight away, the company decided to release it to the public. The storytelling played a big part in the effectiveness and the success of the campaign, as stated by the vice president of global marketing at Absolut Craig Johnson (Campaignlive.com, 2018).

One of the reasons why Absolute decided to employ nudity as the main characteristic of its advertisement must be explored in Swedish cultural heritage. As said by Craig Johnson, head of Marketing division at Absolut, in an interview for Campaign US in 2019, nudity in Sweden is not such a big deal, as it still is in other parts of the world. Since a common stereotype about Sweden and Swedish people revolves around the lack of sexual embarrassment and discomfort, the marketing team wanted to play with that (Campaignlive.com, 2018).

3. Which kind of creative elements/ means of rhetoric come to play?

In general, having nudity as the main aspect of an advertisement can be by itself an uncomfortable and atypical thing to do. Due to differences existing between cultures and individuals, it can be though for a brand to forecast how such a taboo-ish topic could be perceived by the public (Ghauri, 2021). Imagine having nudity to promote a brand that offers food or something to drink. The common sense would say that it could be not only unexpected and devious for the audience, but it could also be dangerous for the brand image, as the ad could open for misinterpretations. However, Absolut used nudity as a metaphor to prove their transparency in the production process (marcommnews.com, 2018). Absolut managed to make effective use of such unusual element, because they appealed to the first two rhetoric perspectives: *logos* and *ethos*. In fact, in the video the production process of the vodka is shown, accompanied with facts about the company and its performances (*logos*), appealing to

people's reason. Moreover, the nudity served as a tool for the company to show personality and charisma, while still being coherent with the main message of the brand (*ethos*).

4. *What is the expected result from the company's perspective?*

Conveying authenticity and truthfulness, showing the brand's active effort to innovate its production processes in a sustainable and efficient way (marcommnews.com). Sustainability is in fact a key facet for the brand, as clearly stated by the brand's motto "Create a better tomorrow, tonight" (thespiritbusiness.com, 2018).

Case 3 : Heinz Ketchup – Wiener Stampede

The Heinz Company is a food brand with a history of over 100 years, and to date, the firm ranks as number one in the US, with over 50% of the ketchup market share. For the 2016 Super Bowl, Heinz created a unique commercial. The 'Weiner stampede' ad, containing the adorable hounds, was released with the launch of the brand's #MeetTheKetchups campaign.

1. *Which message is conveyed?*

"Heinz Tomato Ketchup is synonymous with great-tasting food and fun moments between family and friends." (Multiply UK,2018). It conveys a message to the audience that Heinz ketchup combined with hot dogs is "irresistibly delicious" (Multiply UK,2018).

2. *What was the initial intention behind kind of advertisement?*

According to Monllos (2016), the intention of the ad was to reflect the essence of the brand, thus Heinz being an iconic American brand associated with great food and fun times with family and friends. Therefore, they tried to find something simple, visual, and fun to communicate that hot dogs can't resist the deliciousness of Heinz and celebrate simple greatness.

On the other hand, Heinz has struggled with how to deliver the message of 'simple,

delicious, surprise' and maximize the customer engagement for its main retail partner, Tesco, without online campaign support, limited partnership budgets, and the increasing pressure from rivals (Multiply UK,2018).

3. *Which kind of creative elements/ means of rhetoric come to play?*

The advertisement starts with a wiener dog in a long bread costume running together and flapping its ears in the wind, showing the running dog in slow motion and from different angles. Unlike other businesses that show off their hot dogs with elaborate displays, Heinz's approach to visualizing the word "hot dog" is surprising and unexpected. It melts the hearts of the viewers, most of whom cannot resist the cute puppy, arousing the viewers' interest that resonates with the brand, and makes the ad look very personal and appealing (Lin,2019).

The soundtrack for the commercial is "Without You" by Harry Nilsson, a song that has been popular since its debut in the 1970s. Apparently, people are already familiar with the lyrics and melody of this pop song, but apart from the meaning behind the song dealing with palpitations and sadness, Heinz changes the meaning of the song in advertising in a different way. The song's most famous lyric, "I can't live without you", is used as a metaphor for how hot dogs can't live without Heinz sauce. As the Weiner dogs make their way through a series of Heinz sauces, audiences can hear the most famous lyrics "I couldn't live without you." Without a doubt, the 'Weiner stampede' ad expresses this idea in a surprising, cute, and goofy way that leaves a lasting impression on the viewer, with the Heinz brand image coming to life with humour and friendliness (Lin, 2019).

At the end of the commercial, Heinz Ketchup reinforces the viewer's impression and the connection between hot dogs and Heinz sauce when a voiceover says, "It's hard to resist good taste" as the dog jumps into the arms of the sauce bottle. At the end,

the slogan “Meet Ketchup” is shown and everyone happily hugs a Weiner dog (Lin,2019).

4. What is the expected result from the company’s perspective?

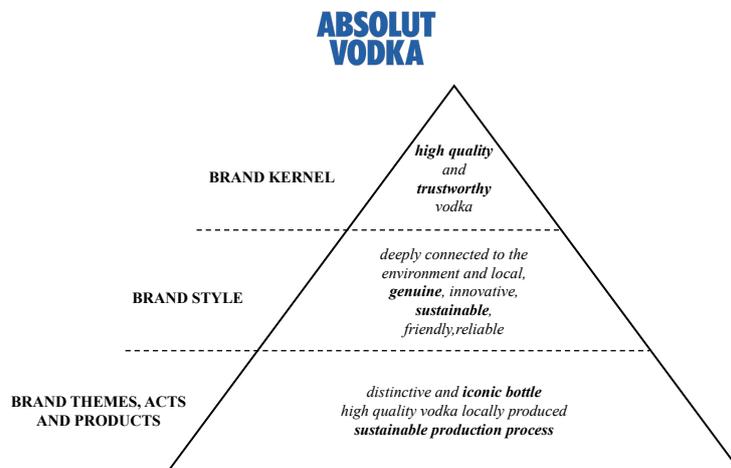
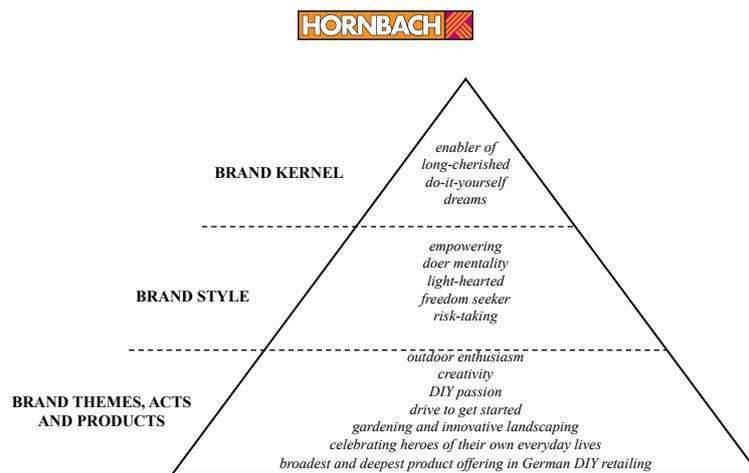
The out-of-the-box, memorable, funny, and slightly quirky "Wiener Stampede" was a huge success and received the most critical acclaim of any Super Bowl commercial with a limited budget, with 60% of the audience being female (Litsa,2016). In the UK, the campaign was highly successful, and it was able to deliver 100 fully branded displays in Tascos outlets across the UK (Multiply UK,2018).

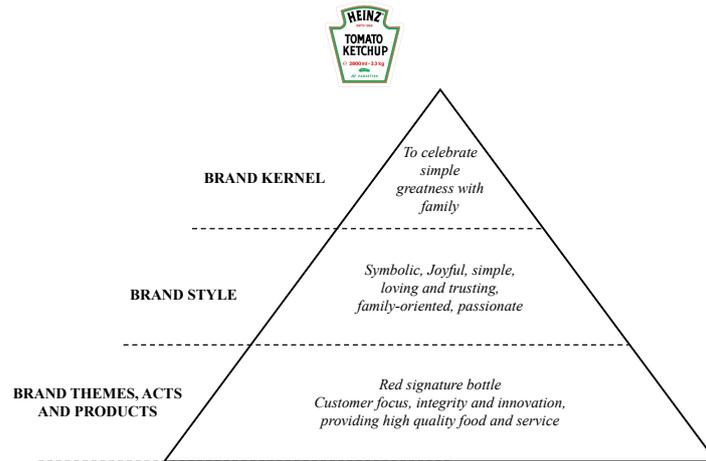
From the brand identity perspective, the commercial reinforces the idea that Heinz

ketchup is synonymous with simple great food and fun times with friends and family. Bring to life the 'Irresistibly Tasty' message in a fun, unexpected way. As a result, Heinz strengthened the brand's affinity and further established Heinz as a category leader and a family favourite brand.

Discussion

In order to better comprehend the key findings from the case analyses in connection to the company’s respective brand identity, we applied Kapferer’s (2012) Brand Identity Pyramid Model for each of the brands respectively:





In light of the three case analyses, we can conclude that with the use of weird elements in brand advertising the three companies managed to bring their brand considerably closer to the audience. With the usage of humoristic, surprising and partially unpredictable elements, the three brands rendered their brand image and identity more distinctive, vibrant and personable, thereby being perceived as more humanized and relatable to the viewer. The brand commercials stretch, surprise and capture the audience's attention via authentically communicating the brand's values and linking creative elements to their core brand identity. While HORNBAACH and Heinz focused on ethos and pathos elements in their brand communication, Absolut Vodka managed to include all three perspectives of brand rhetoric into their promotional clip. Overall, it became evident that the weird creative elements in brand advertising applied in the case of HORNBAACH, Heinz and Absolut considerably strengthened both cognitive and emotional intimacy with the brand.

Research Results

Developing the Matrix

In line with secondary research and the case examination of weird brand advertising

campaigns from Absolut, Heinz Ketchup and HORNBAACH, this paper has concluded a framework that suggests the relationship of brand intimacy with the level of deviance in brand advertising.

Therefore, the framework implies that the higher the level of unexpected and strange creative elements a commercial incorporates, the higher the level of cognitive and emotional brand intimacy it can generate. It is critical to mention, however, that the decision of a company on how strange or surprising an advertisement should be designed is always bound to internal and external factors. For example, the industry that a company operates in and the target group that it serves are critical aspects to be considered, as well as adhering to the overall brand identity that represents the core reference point of every communicational decision.

Elements of the Framework

The matrix depicts the relation of added brand intimacy on the vertical axis and the level of unpredictability and surprise as a consequence of using weird elements in brand communication on the horizontal axis. In this regard, different characters of brands can be distinguished with different degrees of implementing "unexpected"

elements in their brand advertising campaigns.

The different types of approaching “unexpected” elements in brand advertising therefore represent the degree to which a company is willing to take the risk of sending out weird brand messages and how this ultimately relates to fostering the level of brand intimacy.

Four Characters of Weird Branding Framework

Firstly, there can be distinguished the category of “royalties”, which are those brands that already hold a privileged position in the market and that do not need additional elements of surprise or unexpectedness in their brand communication to increase brand intimacy.

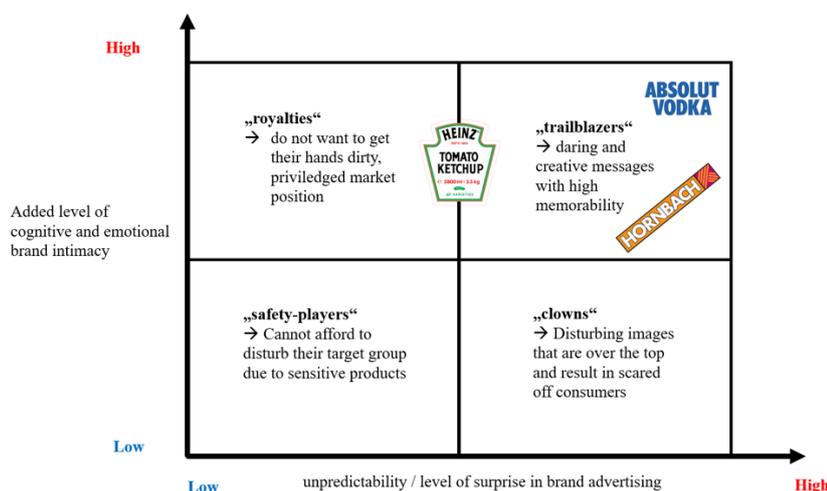
In contrast, the category of “trailblazers” are those brands which have a high willingness to play with their audience’s minds and take the risk of transmitting daring and unexpected brand

advertisements. Such ads may be perceived as strange at first but prove to be highly effective in raising awareness with and decreasing emotional distance to their target group.

On the other hand, there is the category of “clowns” which represent such brands that overshoot the mark of effectively implementing weird elements in their brand advertising. The problematic issues hereby may be rooted in wanting too much, that is stretching the tolerance level beyond the acceptable, or overlooking critical cultural aspects that lead to offending or disturbing a target group.

Last but not least, the category of “safety-players” are brands that based on industry or product sensitive factors cannot afford being perceived as unprofessional or to disturb their target group with atypical and unconventional contents. Therefore, this category does not achieve any added value in brand intimacy via weird brand advertising.

Brand Intimacy and Weird Brand Communication Framework



The Framework applied on Absolut, Hornbach and Heinz

These three cases provided a lens for this research to explore the reasons and actions for using weird elements in marketing strategies.

When applying the proposed framework on the specific case examples, it was found that each of the companies followed a similar strategy of implementing unexpectedly humorous brand messages that are directly linked to the advertised products, therefore managing to decrease the perceived

emotional and cognitive distance to the audience. While Absolut Vodka comparably holds the most extreme position on the weirdness scale, it is also the most successful with regard to the audience's resonance in reaction to the promotional video. In comparison, the German DIY home improvement chain HORNBACH does not prove equally as successful with their promotional clip, despite their adoption of highly weird elements in narrative storytelling, which might be due to the fact that they played with risky stereotypes in exaggerated ways that made it seem controversial to some degree. With their wholesome hotdog clip, Heinz Ketchup is located at a more moderate position on the weird scale, as the creative elements chosen are less provocative and risky, but still play with the audience's senses.

Managerial Implications and Contributions

In order to maximize the saliency and effectiveness of an advertisement, a brand must try to combine the art of rhetoric with the concepts of divergence and relevance described before.

We believe that divergence and meaningfulness are strictly related to one another and are both essential to develop memorable and effective communicational strategies. A brand should try to catch the audience's attention through unpredictable and disruptive solutions, while delivering a meaningful message to increase brand-customer relationship and intimacy.

The proposed framework can be helpful in such a way as to explain the contribution of divergent elements of weirdness for fostering brand intimacy, considering the increasingly widespread use of the element of weird storytelling in many creative advertisings.

The conceptualised Brand Intimacy and Weird Brand Communication Framework may provide new insights for companies

with different styles and core values willing to use the framework to spark some weirdness and unexpectedness in their brands.

Firstly, the framework can assist a brand in determining its position on the weirdness scale and can help to reveal if the brand's communicated messages align with the values and personality it wants to project.

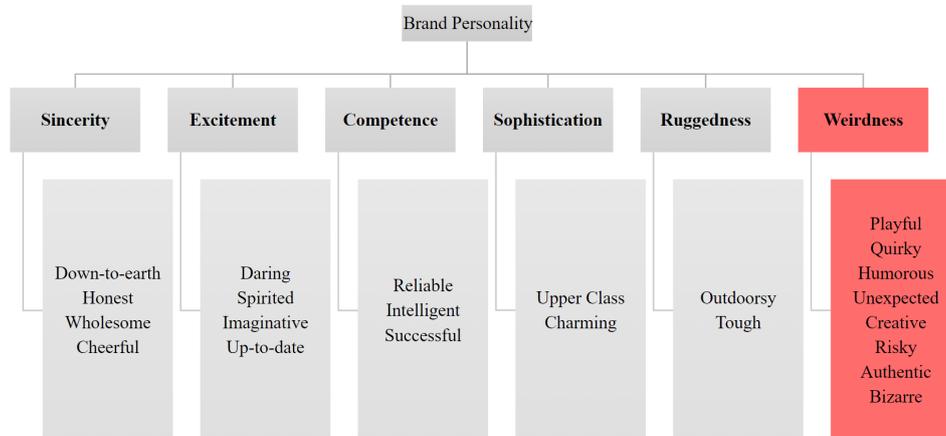
Second, the framework also assists the brand to decide the direction it wants to go within the framework, that is, how much the brand wants to integrate the element of surprise into its marketing strategies and what kind of outcomes it expects to achieve. In other words, the framework reflects which type of brand identity and personality the company as a sender wants consumers to receive from the brand.

Furthermore, the framework can be used to analyse other competitors' campaigns and advertising, assisting brands in developing effective and unexpected marketing tactics.

Moreover, the suggested relation of increased brand intimacy and divergent brand advertising can provide useful implications for "sleeping brands", which are faced with the risk of obsolescence. As a means of rejuvenating the 'sleeping brand', brand revitalization strives to update the 'sleeping brand,' typically avoiding excessive references to the past and history (Dion & Mazzalovo, 2016). Therefore, it is a fantastic notion to employ a distinct brand personality to draw people closer together in order to modify people's impressions about outdated brands.

Finally, this paper contributes to the strategic brand management literature by providing an extended version of Aaker's brand personality framework, as seen in the Figure below. The added dimension of weirdness on the brand personality scale can be described by a broad set of determining features concluded from the case analyses, namely *playfulness, quirkiness, unexpectedness, creativity, humour, risk, authenticity and bizarreness.*

Therefore, it can be suggested that weird brand communications entail versatile messages that hold high potential resonance with the target audience.



Extended Brand Personality Framework (Aaker, 1997)

Conclusion

The aim of the paper was to analyse and discuss the relationship between weirdness in advertisements and the concept of brand intimacy. Our work tried to fill an existing literature gap by explaining and dissecting how divergent and unexpected elements in communication can positively affect and build brand-customer relationships. In the last few years, the phenomenon of globalization has dramatically changed the way companies operate in the market, raising both competition and customer demands. Moreover, activities such as positioning and communication have become extremely vital for brand managers. Now more than ever, challenges like communicating brand identity in a meaningful and differentiating way, increasing brand intimacy and customers relationship, having a distinctive value proposition and unique positioning, are crucial steps for any company to achieve competitive advantages.

In the first part of the paper, the concept of brand identity has been explained through the Kapferer Pyramid Model. The premise

of the model is that every brand should have a consistent direction and vision in order to achieve effective communication and convey the right message to stakeholders (Kapferer, 2012). Brand kernel, brand style and brand theme, acts and products are the three different levels of the pyramid, which are closely related to one another and influence each other. Therefore, the positive coexistence of these three elements defines an effective and well-structured brand identity.

The work then focused on the concept of weird and how different meanings it may be associated with, depending both on the individual or culture. Infact, different individuals are said to have different views on what is weird and what is not, due to different backgrounds or built-in tolerance. It is therefore important for a company to assess those cultural differences and plan prior research to better understand its audience characteristics.

Moreover, the Aaker model of brand personality has been introduced, which presents five different traits that express and describe a brand's character. Part of our research was conducted to analyse the

relevance of unexpected elements in brands' communicational campaigns, and thus prove how such elements could increase brand saliency. For this reason, we decided to extend Aaker's model adding "weirdness" as a sixth dimension to the existing brand personality scale.

Often times, creativity goes hand in hand with unconventional and unexpected solutions in advertising. In the paper we therefore explained the concepts of relevance and divergence within creativity, as well as a brief sum up of Aristotle's brand rhetoric.

Three examples of divergent advertisements were examined: *HORNBACH- The Smell of Spring*, *Absolut Vodka - Nothing To Hide*, *Heinz Ketchup – Wiener Stampede*. For each case the four research questions were answered regarding the meaning of the ad and its content, the creative elements used, the companies' initial intention as well as the expected results from the campaigns.

After dissecting those three successful cases, we developed a framework that outlines the link between emotional and cognitive brand intimacy and unexpectedness in advertising. Therefore, we distinguished between four different possible brand's attitudes: *royalties*, *trailblazers*, *safety-players* and *clowns*. High levels of brand intimacy and high degrees of surprise in a brand's advertising make a firm a "trailblazer", thus a company that can deliver meaningful messages while adopting creative and unexpected elements.

The opposite situation is represented by "safety-players", brands that take almost no risk and moreover they can hardly convey powerful messages and memorable advertisements.

Limitations and Further Research

This paper is subject to a variety of limitations. To begin with, one overall limitation to this paper's results is little reliability due to timely constraints that did not allow in-depth empirical investigations into the phenomenon of "weird" brand communication. Therefore, a more detailed analysis of the case examples, following a qualitative and/or quantitative approach is highly recommended for further studies in this field and a confirmation of the proposed framework. Furthermore, the small sample size examined in this paper is likely not representative enough to guarantee a generalizability of the proposed framework.

Moreover, the interpretation and analysis of the cases were inevitably based on subjective views, therefore making it imperative for future research to explore how weird elements in brand advertising is received in other cultural contexts.

Additionally, this paper did not examine examples of weird brand commercials that were unsuccessful in the way of not achieving the desired reception and resonance, therefore only focusing on successful campaigns that is likely to cause a distortion of the bigger picture.

References

- Aaker, J. L. & Fournier, S., 1995, "A Brand As a Character, a Partner and a Person: Three Perspectives on the Question of Brand Personality", in NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 22, eds. Frank R. Kardes and Mita Sujjan, Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 391-395.
- Aaker, J.L., 1997. Dimensions of brand personality. *Journal of marketing research*, 34(3), pp.347-356.
- Ang, Lee, Y.H., Leong, S.M., 2007, "The Ad Creativity Cube: Conceptualization and Initial Validation," *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 35 (2), 220–32
- Ang, S.H. and Low, S.Y.M., 2000. Exploring the dimensions of ad creativity. *Psychology & Marketing*, 17: 835-854.
- Baack, D.W., Wilson, R.T., van Dessel, M.M., Patti, C.H., 2015, Advertising to businesses: Does creativity matter?
- Banerjee, S., 2016. Influence of consumer personality, brand personality, and corporate personality on brand preference: An empirical investigation of interaction effect. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*.
- Brown, C.A., Dryden, W. J., 2004. Quality storytents: Using choice theory to support reading through a community literacy project. *International Journal of Reality Theory* (24), 3-14.
- Campaignlive, 2018. Vodka and nudity is a winning combination in Absolut's new "Nothing to Hide" campaign. Retrieved October 8, 2021 from <https://www.campaignlive.com/article/vodka-nudity-winning-combination-absolut-s-new-nothing-hide-campaign/1456721>
- Digg, 2018. Absolut Vodka Made An Ad Where Everyone Is Naked And It's Hilarious. Retrieved October 10, 2021 from <https://www.brandnewmag.com/absolut-vodka-made-an-ad-where-everyone-is-naked-and-its-hilarious/>
- Dion, D. and Mazzalovo, G., 2016. Reviving sleeping beauty brands by rearticulating brand heritage. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(12), pp.5894-5900.
- Flanagan, R., 2014, January. Why Is Brand Identity Important? Nuanced Thoughts. Retrieved February 24, 2015, from <http://nuancedmedia.com/brand-identity-importance>.
- Frank, John, N., 2009, "Get Your Head in the Game," *Marketing News*, 43 (3), 10.
- Frazer, C.F., (1983), "Creative Strategy: A Management Perspective," *Journal of Advertising*, 12 (4), 36–41
- Gauri, P. N., Cateora, P., 2021, *International Marketing*

Gesenhues, A., 2016. 'Heinz "Wiener Stampede" Super Bowl Ad Launches Brand's #MeetTheKetchups Campaign'. MarTech, 1 February 2016. <https://martech.org/heinz-wiener-stampede-super-bowl-ad-launches-brands-meettheketchups-campaign/>.

Hornbach, 2021. *Unsere Haltung. FAQ- The Smell of Spring*. Retrieved October 7, 2021 from <https://www.hornbach.de/aktuelles/unsere-haltung/>

Hornbach, 2021. *Development in sales of HORNBAACH Group*. Retrieved October 16th, 2021 from https://www.hornbachholding.de/en/about_hornbach/zahlen_fakten/umsatzentwicklung/first_article_13.html

Japutra, A. and Molinillo, S., 2019. Responsible and active brand personality: On the relationships with brand experience and key relationship constructs. *Journal of Business Research*, 99, pp.464-471.

Kapferer, J.N., 2012. *The new strategic brand management: Advanced insights and strategic thinking*. Kogan page publishers.

Karlsson, J., Yao, X., Cetino, M. and Lu, M., 2018. Artistic Brand or Brand with Art?. *LBMG Strategic Brand Management-Masters Paper Series*.

Lehnert, K., Till, B. D. & Ospina, J.M., 2014. Advertising Creativity: The Role of Divergence Versus Meaningfulness, *Journal of Advertising*, 43:3, 274-285

Lin, M. 'A Rhetorical Analysis of Heinz's 2016 Commercial "Heinz Wiener Stampede"'. *Digication*, 2019. <https://asu.digication.com/2019-fall-eng108-mengjyel/p1-essay>.

Litsa, T., 2016. 'Heinz Dominates Social Media with Cute Wiener Stampede Super Bowl Commercial'. *Creative Guerrilla Marketing (blog)*, 24 February 2016. <http://www.creativeguerrillamarketing.com/viral-marketing/heinz-dominates-social-media-cute-wiener-stampede-super-bowl-commercial/>.

Li, M., 2015. *Narrative Advertising* (Doctoral dissertation, East Tennessee State University).

Marcommnews, 2018. Absolut Employees Bare All to Show it Really is 'the Vodka with Nothing to Hide'. Retrieved October 8, 2021 from <https://marcommnews.com/absolut-employees-bare-all-to-show-it-really-is-the-vodka-with-nothing-to-hide/>

Monllos, K., 2016. 'Heinz Releases the (Adorable) Hounds in This Hilarious Super Bowl Commercial', 1 February 2016. <https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/heinz-releases-weiner-stampede-its-adorably-hilarious-super-bowl-commercial-169325/>

Multiply UK Ltd ., 2018. 'Heinz - Wiener Stampede', 3 January 2018. <http://www.multiplyagency.com/heinz-wiener-stampede>

Natarelli, M. and Plapler, R., 2017. *Brand Intimacy: A New Paradigm in Marketing*. Hatherleigh Press, pp.80-83.

Newbery, P. and Farnham, K., 2013. Experience design: A framework for integrating brand, experience, and value. John Wiley & Sons, pp.69-70.

Porter, B., 2019, How Being Weird Can Grow Your Brand, Retrieved October 7, 2021 from <https://www.awwwards.com/talk-mailchimps-director-of-brand-design-brandy-porter-being-weird-will-grow-your-brand.html>

Ramsenthaler P., July 20th, 2020. *Hitting It Home: 4 Winning Principles behind German DIY Retailer Hornbach's Marketing*. Retrieved October 16th, 2021 from <https://www.marmind.com/blog/hornbach-marketing/>

Randazzo, S., 2006. Subaru: The emotional myths behind the brand's growth. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 46(1), pp.11-17.

Referralcandy, 2017. How Absolut Became the #1 Premium Vodka in the World. Retrieved October 9, 2021 from <https://www.referralcandy.com/blog/absolut-vodka-marketing-strategy/>

Smartinsights, 2018. Campaign of the week: The longest running print ad marketing campaign in history. Retrieved October 9, 2021 from <https://www.smartinsights.com/online-brand-strategy/international-marketing/campaign-of-the-week-the-longest-running-print-ad-marketing-campaign-in-history/>

Smith, R.E., Chen, J., Yang, X., 2008. The Impact of Advertising Creativity on the Hierarchy of Effects, *Journal of Advertising*, 37:4, 47-62

Smith, R.E., Yang X., 2004, Toward a General Theory of Creativity in Advertising: Examining the Role of Divergence. *Marketing Theory*. 4(1-2):31-58.

The drum, 2018. Absolut: The Vodka with Nothing to Hide by BBH London. Retrieved October 7, 2021 from <https://www.thedrum.com/creative-works/project/bbh-london-absolut-the-vodka-with-nothing-hide>

The Kraft Heinz Company ., 2021. 'Our Purpose, Vision, Values, and Leadership Principles' <https://www.kraftheinzcompany.com/purposevisionvalues.html>.

The spirits business, 2018. Absolut launches film featuring naked employees. Retrieved October 8, 2021 from <https://www.thespiritsbusiness.com/2018/02/absolut-transparency-film-features-naked-employees/>

Yin, R., and Moore, G., 1987. The use of advanced technologies in special education. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 20(1), 60.

Zainal, Z., 2007. Case study as a research method. *Jurnal kemanusiaan*, 5(1).