

Beyond Marketing: The Brand Story

Don't forget that everything you deal with is only one thing and nothing else. And don't forget the language of omens. And, above all, don't forget to follow your Personal Legend through to its conclusion. But before I go, I want to tell you a little story...

Paulo Coelho - The Alchemist

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Coelho is not a great writer. However, his most important book speaks about his Personal Story. The book has been more than a best seller. The Alchemist has almost become a brand. Coelho is a contemporary author with an extremely powerful personal brand too. Yet, this is not what I was driving at. It is the story right in the middle of the book that I am drawn by. The story within the story, the one which describes the way to achieving the Personal Legend or, better said, to finding the Secret of Happiness.

And I cannot help telling it: *A certain shopkeeper set his son to learn about the Secret of*

Happiness from the wisest man in the world. The lad wandered through the desert for forty days, and finally came upon a beautiful castle, high atop a mountain. It was there that the Wise Man lived.

Rather than finding a saintly man, though, our hero on entering the main room of the castle, saw a hive of activity: tradesmen came and went, people were conversing in the corners, a small orchestra was playing soft music, and there was a table covered with platters of the most delicious food in that part of the world. The wise man conversed with every one, and the boy had to wait for two hours before it was his turn to be given the man's attention.

The Wise Man listened attentively to the boy's explanation of why he had come, but told him that he didn't have time just then to explain the Secret of Happiness. He suggested that the boy look around the palace and return in two hours.

'Meanwhile, I want to ask you to do something' said the Wise Man, handing the boy a teaspoon that held two drops of oil. 'As you wander around, carry this spoon with you without allowing the oil to spill.'

The boy began climbing and descending the many stairways of the palace, keeping his eyes fixed on the spoon. After two hours, he returned to the room where the Wise Man was.

'Well', asked the Wise Man, 'did you see the Persian tapestries that are hanging in my dining hall? Did you see the garden that it took the master gardener ten years to create? Did you notice the beautiful parchments in my library?'

The boy was embarrassed and confessed that he had observed nothing. His only concern had been not to spill the oil that the Wise Man had entrusted to him.

'Then go back and observe the marvels of my world', said the Wise Man. 'You cannot trust a man if you don't know his house.'

Relieved, the boy picked up the spoon and returned to his exploration of the palace, this time observing all of the works of art on the ceilings and the walls. He saw the gardens, the mountains all around him, the beauty of the flowers, and the taste with which everything had been selected. Upon returning to the Wise Man, he related in detail everything he had seen.

'But where are the drops of oil I entrusted to you?' asked the Wise Man.

Looking down at the spoon he held, the boy saw that the oil was gone.

'Well, there is only one piece of advice I can give to you,' said the Wisest of Wise Men. 'The

Secret of Happiness is to see all the marvels of the world and never to forget the drops of oil on the spoon'.

I must admit that I wanted to begin this chapter with the following definition given by John Murphy, the founder of Interbrand: branding is the process of developing and maintaining a set of attributes and coherent, pertinent, distinctive and protectable values in accordance with consumers' desires. Therefore, a brand represents a synthesis of physical aesthetic, sensible and structural elements.

However, I realised that Coelho's definition is much better. What does "a set of attributes and coherent, pertinent, distinctive and protectable values" mean? The drops on a teaspoon. What does "in accordance with consumers' desires" mean? It means to look into the world around, see its trends, its opportunities that is exactly: the gardens, mountains, all the beauties of the palace.

What does it mean to concentrate only on keeping the two oil drops on the teaspoon? Marketing myopia – as Kotler would say. What does it mean to look only around? The loss of the brand's essence under the pressure of hyperconsumption; loss of focus – as Al Ries would call it.

As a result, I believe that this anecdote of Coelho's is one of the most beautiful stories on brand. A story which, had it been known for instance by those from Polaroid, would have prevented them from adjudging themselves bankrupt in 2001, despite the fact that they benefited from a well-known name which became synonymous with its category.

What has really happened?

In 1948, Edwin Land, a graduate from Harvard University, invented a camera which allowed colours to be transferred from negative celluloid to film inside a tight casket

i.e. the first system of taking instant photographs. Under the name of Polaroid, these cameras were in vogue in the '70s, having been used both by sophisticated consumers and by celebrities and artists like Andy Warhol.

Nevertheless, Polaroid has not understood its essence, its brand driver very well. Its trump was given by the fact that, when film cameras were in vogue, you could not know what image you had captured until you took the photo to an image development studio. This was a winning card for which all consumers were willing to pay more. And yet, under the pressure of the market, Polaroid made a first mistake when, in the 1980s, the first photo labs which developed photos in an hour emerged and the prices of traditional cameras were significantly reduced.

What looked like a real menace in reality, Polaroid considered to be an opportunity. Instead of sticking to its "personal legend", instead of insisting on the fact that it was the only brand to still offer instant photographs, Polaroid appropriated the story of its rival. The company entered the market of traditional cameras in contradiction with its brand essence.

In other words, by paying too much attention to what was going on around it, to the evolution of the market, it let the drops from the teaspoon pour. After this moment the popularity of the brand had constantly degraded up to the year 2001 when Polaroid declared its bankruptcy.

Where did the mistake come from?

Here is what John Hegarty, President of the agency which worked for Edwin Land's brand, said: *Polaroid continued to consider its product to be a camera (...) Yet, the process of the brand evolution taught us that Polaroid is not a camera but a social lubricant.* (my translation)

It is for this reason that the company has probably not noticed that *its personal story* offered it the possibility to enter a different category. A category which evolved right from its brand *driver*.

However, it is strange that, by paying so much attention to the landscape which surrounded it, the brand had not grasped another opportunity.

An opportunity which would have allowed the identity, *its personal story* to have been preserved by starting exactly from the competitive advantage which had established it: *No trump was more powerful than its instantaneous nature. Nowadays, Polaroid could have been a power in digital photography if somebody had tried to understand at the time the place the brand would have fitted in. Yet, nobody cared about it.*

I find Peter Post's statement, manager of one of the biggest Canadian marketing company, very important. And this is because it indicates the way in which an accurate identification of the brand driver may strategically support the company.

This evokes an idea Kotler formulated by quoting Peter Drucker: *Nonetheless, we affirm that the marketing must direct the strategy of each element of the business. It has to be the starting point in the development of the business plan. Peter Drucker defined it more than 30 years ago: 'A company has only two basic functions: the innovation and the marketing.'*

And Kotler also added something else. He said: *Most of the present marketing relies only on one of the 4Ps; in other words, marketing deals only with promotion, with other departments heavily determining the product, the price, the sale. I remember about a very important European airline company whose marketing vice-president avowed to me that he raised neither the price of tickets nor the in-flight services*

*conditions (the meal, the staff, the setting) and he did not want to change the flights schedule. How can marketing be efficient if the 4Ps are not unitarily controlled?*¹

We believe that it is for this reason that branding was invented, because it offers a strategic responsibility originating in the centre of the company which is thus forced to regulate all the other components function of the brand. That is why, in the example I provided in the previous chapter about the Singapore Airlines, the concept of the Singapore Girl campaign was not basically related to promotion or marketing, but to the strategic essence of the brand and, as a matter of consequence, directly to the management of the company.

In fact, what we would like to suggest is that in a market in which consumers become “pro-sumers”, determining thus the form and content of the product they are to consume, conditionings related to brands are becoming more and more important.

So it is for this reason that we can speak of multisensorial brands, of Holistic Selling Proposition, of redefining the notion of brand which must signify more than a labelling.

This is the reason why we are trying to put forward another classification of brands made by the Research International Agency. The model which we continue to consider. Let us start with a first typology, the one of the so-called **Master brands**, such as Nike, McDonald's, Nokia, Visa, Coca-Cola, or Sony, brands which define their category, the latter being impossible to be conceived without them. Let us start with a first typology, the one of the so-called **Master brands**, such as Nike, McDonald's, Nokia, Visa, Coca-Cola, or Sony, brands which define their category,

the latter being impossible to be conceived without them.

As global brands, they rely on universal well-defined themes: Nike means *just do it*, Nokia means connecting.

They manage to get these values across so well than they often turn into a sort of gadgets used to communicate the identity and aspirations of their users.

Thus, in Japan for instance, the limited editions of Nike are extremely looked for by those kids who want to state their individuality. Moreover, through NikeID we already have an inverted conditioning of the consumption in which the mega-brand turns its consumers into some “pro-sumers” who are given the possibility to produce the design of their own sports shoes by themselves.

Often positioned, in an aspirational manner, outside Europe and the United States, these brands, whose country of origin is in general easy to identify, manage to transcend their national origins.

In this way, Coca-Cola, which is considered to be an American beverage par excellence, does not yet possess Americanism as its central value. Although, as Donald Keough its managing director stated on July 11, 1985 when he announced the coming back to the Cola-Cola's classic taste:

The simple fact is that all the time and money and skill poured into consumer research on the new Coca-Cola could not measure or reveal the deep and abiding emotional attachment to original Coca-Cola by so many people. The passion for original Coca-Cola – and that is the word for it ‘passion’ – was something that caught us by surprise. It is a wonderful American mystery, a lovely American enigma, and you cannot measure it any more than you can measure love, pride or patriotism.

¹Ibidem, p. 33;

But the question researchers ask regards the source of the persistency of these global mega-brands.

The survey conducted by Research International shows that the persistency of these brands is mainly due to innovations which, at the level of consumers, allows them to be perceived as young and relevant brands capable of suspending the products' life cycle in a sort of an eternal immortality.

Hence, the affinity with these brands relies on:

- a combination of authority – which equally implies confidence and innovation;
- the consumers' agreement – which depends on a certain degree of acceptability all the elements of branding should observe; and, most of the times
- the identification of the target public – which involves both a stable relationship tot it as well as a sort of a nostalgia which determines them to always go back to the brand.

Apart form these components the survey adds another remark.

Master-brands confer power on their users, functioning as if they were contemporary

⁷This quote is reproduced in the Matt Haig's volume – "Mari eşecuri ale unor branduri de renume", p. 27; talismans capable of granting people access to a world of their own idealized images.

But the problem is that the power of these so-called "talismans" often grows stronger and then, the consumer feels he is losing control as if, instead of the brand to communicate his personality, he himself turns into a prop for the brand's personality.

This opens a new trap for the power of the Mega-brands which, instead of conferring

power, they compel recognition by their own force and then they may lose significant market shares.

Another category the people from the Research International group speak of is that of the so-called Prestige brands or brands of prestige. This is the category of those "premium" brands which embody the cultural myths of quality.

Chanel, Mercedes, Armani or BMW are examples of such brands which are mainly purchased due to their aspirational value.

They equally refer to the accumulation of a history which speaks for the quality of the brand by offering guarantees on its persistency and the capacity to innovate by installing itself at the top of the category, playing the part of "trend setters".

Just as in the case of Mega-brands, they maintain their immortality without prolonging the optimum age of their life cycle, by rather rhythmically reinventing their products inside the definition of the same brand.

Thus, we may say that unlike the comfortable inertia of Mega-brands to which the change of some products' attributes may lead to serious temblors in the architecture of the brand, prestige brands must renew themselves permanently, reinventing themselves through collections (Chanel, Armani) or by launching new models (Mercedes or BMW).

And, as we have been talking about the inertia of Mega-brands, let us consider the disaster brought about by the change in the Coca-Cola formula following the launch of the Coca-Cola Classic, or the impact of the change in the flavour alteration of the McDo fries. Consequently, I may say that the power of Mega-brands comes also from standardization whereas that of Prestige brands arises precisely from de-standardization.

It is for this reason that I would have an objection. The example given by Research International about the way in which limited editions of Nike sports shoes were treated on the Japan market make us think about the fact that Nike behaves on this market more like a Prestige brand than Mega brand.

But let us continue with the rest of the classification.

The third category is called GloCal² brands and corresponds to those brands which, despite the fact that they have global coverage, are rather perceived as local brands due to the way in which they relate to the cultural environment where they develop.

In general, they belong to those categories of products which do not involve a strong usage exposition and that is why they have a few aspirational associated elements.

These are brands belonging to the food or maintenance products category, triggering a low involvement rate on behalf of the consumer.

The affinity to the brand relies – as the authors of the study pinpoint – once more on a certain authority which implies both confidence in the product and brand as well as the identification of the values of the brand.

I would like to add that this identification is not of statute but emotional and it relies on the care the brand manifests towards which any taking back in the use of the pro-

duct would imply a sort of a nostalgic reiteration of the golden age.

And it is from this point of view that I feel compelled to make several observations. I believe that beyond these characteristics which the survey conducted by Research International enumerates, there is a danger for the three categories to meet. As previously shown, Nike may just as well be a Master-brand, as it can be, on several segments of market, a Prestige brand. Similarly, global brands such as Danone, Dove or Nescafé, given as examples for the category of Glocal brands, are still felt in Romania as Master-brands rather than glocal brands.

Under these circumstances, I feel the urge to add another differentiating element within this classification, an element which exists latently but has not been identified as such.

This would function as genus proximus to help us better define the category.

And I would say: the Master-brand delocalizes, the Prestige brand de-socializes, whereas the Glocal brand de-temporalizes. What does this really mean?

When I say that the Master-brand delocalizes I refer to the way in which these brands are consumed. When you eat “French fries” at McDo, this is delocalized consumption; no matter where you are in the world, the taste of the fries is identical.

Let us take another example. You probably remember the famous spot showing a baby who smiles when seeing the McDo logo and when the logo disappears due to the sway of his cradle, he bursts into tears.

This is the “classic” version, whereas the campaign centred on a kid who goes along with his parents to see a house and decides that is the house to choose because he can

²The word, glocal a compound of the antonyms global+local, has been in use for some years now in the vocabulary of multinational companies; it sum up a certain slogan of international marketing: “Think global, act local”, which seems to have become again “think local, act local”, according to Douglas Daft, CEO at Coca-Cola, quotes made by Peter Cheverton in “How Come Your Brand Isn’t Working Hard Enough?”, Kogan, 2002, p.131;

spot the McDo restaurant on one of its windows may be considered to be another rendition of the same concept. What do we have here? Isn't this another example of "localization"? Wherever you may be, irrespective of the city, country or continent, what matters is to have a McDonald's in the neighbourhood. This is how the paradox of de-localization of Master brands works. They extract the consumer from his current geography to relocate him within their own geography.

But what happens to brands of prestige? I have already said they de-socialize, in fact hinting at maintaining the contrary. Like all aspirational brands, they are purchased to up-grade their identity. What does this 'up-grade' imply? Nothing else but a displacement toward that aspirational image a consumer makes of himself. For whose sake does this displacement occur if not for the sake of belonging to a certain social group?

Therefore, this abstract de-socialization does nothing but socially anchor the consumer. And thus, the effect of social dislocation practically aims at re-socialization as part of a circular process.

The same scheme we have been taking about so far applies for glocal brands too but on a temporal level. To gather local connotations, global brands have to assimilate the memory of that particular space.

And this memory refers to a certain capacity to relate not only to cultural stereotypes but to time as well. A brand becomes glocal when it assimilates too a past that has never been his without letting anyone feel this thing.

So here is how the very "de-temporalization" of these brands implies an interesting temporal relation based on the capacity to descend on the rope of time. And in order

to descend on the rope of time you certainly need a carefully circumscribed space. This is how glocalization takes place.

Let us consider for instance the brand *Bunătați de la bunica* (Goodies from the Granny) launched in 2000 by Orkla Foods. Although it actually belongs to a Norwegian company which operates in 14 states: Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Austria, the Czech Republic, Portugal, Romania and Russia, the brand *Bunătați de la bunica* (Goodies from the Granny) has been rapidly assimilated by the Romanian market growing into a market leader in the mustard category.

Well, you may say that it is very unlikely for an indigenous sturdy granny to give her nephews mustard jars or bottles of sunflower oil (products commercialized under the same brand), instead of pound cake. Nevertheless, here is how the name of the brand, as comfortable as a log fire, managed to sell even what it does not very well correspond to its content. Why? Because it covers that genus proximus of glocalization we have been talking about before.

The name of the brand *Bunătați de la bunica* (Goodies from the Granny) has the capacity to descend in time, down to a personal history which each of us deposits and which grows into a sort of local patrimony. Even if the grannies from the TV ad look more like some grannies who had emigrated to Germany than the women pensioners in Romania, the brand locates itself by descending, as we have already said, on the rope of time.

But the other two categories of brands the researchers from Research International speak of do not exhibit the same qualities. It is the case of those Tribal Brands and Super Brands.

Tribal Brands have something in common with prestige brands, several tribal brands being able to change in time into prestige brands. Tribal brands are brands purchased ostentatiously as an alternative to Master brands. They will be thus preferred by young sophisticated consumers influenced by the trends of fashion. Consequently, the relation to tribal brands is extremely powerful because they express and nurture at the same time their individuality. In this way we reach a level where the consumer does not only borrow the story of the brand but, as in the case of prestige brands, ends by writing it.

This is the peculiarity of tribal brands whose consumption does not imply the assimilation of a brand's story, but the writing of it. Apple is the prototype of tribal brands, mainly because this brand represents more than the developing of certain values.

Apple,³ like other tribal brands, makes up a community. A well-defined community of users shut to the products of its rivals, ritualised and benefiting from its own codes. This is a community which takes the duty of writing the story of the brand upon itself, which is responsible for its evolution as it knows the brand probably better than the employees of the marketing department.

I remember that the re-branding of one of the most important mobile phone operator on the Romanian market, Orange Romania, has been "affected" by the coming to London not of some marketing managers but of the so-called "ambassadors" of the brand. Their role was to communicate and support the values of the brand in those countries where local mobile phone companies were to be re-branded as Orange.

The idea that a brand should have ambassadors comes from a tribal culture. These

ambassadors were representing the brand to the same extent as they took part in the making of its story, by sharing codes and trying to build up rituals of communication. But this did not turn Orange into a tribal brand. Although, I may say that at a certain point in time, Dialog customers (the mobile network brand which afterwards has been re-branded as Orange) had a certain "tribal" behaviour

³Considered to be the most loved brand in 2004, Apple covers only 1,8 % of the PC world market, in fact losing significant rates in the year 1993 when it held 9,4% of the market share, practically the same portion as in the year 1984 when the first Mac was launched. However, we should keep in mind that Apple has refused to offer licenses for the technology employed for its system, positioning itself as an alternative to Microsoft, Intel, IBM or Dell systems and that the prices of its products have remained high in relation to its rivals'. Nevertheless, the value of the brand in 2004 reached 6.871 bn dollars, an increase compared with 2003 when the brand equity summed 5.554 bn USD which allowed the brand to move upward from the position 50 to 45 in the top of the most prestigious brands in the world, hitting a record increase of 24%. Yet, this spectacular growth was mainly due to its iPods, products which allowed Apple to gain a 25% market share of the music players world market in 2003, considering that its market share in 2001 for this category was 0. However, we must add that this outstanding evolution has been assisted by Steve Jobs, Managing Director for Apple Computer Inc., the person of whom Jimmy Iovine, President of Interscope Geffen A&M Records, a division of Universal Music Group, said: "Jobs is a true visionary, the kind of man who changes an entire industry." (my translation) - an extract from the article "Apple iese la rampă", Biz Magazine, no. 80, February-March 2004, p. 47, an article taken over from Business Week Magazine.

in the sense that they had an extremely active relation to the brand.

By becoming a market leader, Orange has changed in Romania in a Master brand whose power is well-known and yet, one to which customers are no longer willing to make sacrifices – the way they were willing to do years ago, in the case of its former tribal equivalent.

In fact, it is very hard to maintain the tribal aspect of a brand once it has become a market leader. To this respect, one should have a very good marketing director capable of generating and controlling an extremely powerful personal story of the brand, written afterwards by each consumer. But this was not utterly impossible. I remember a story about a meeting of Macromedia held in San Francisco which Steve Jobs attended. To mark the fact that a PDA launched by Apple around the mid-1990s went out of use, Jobs dumped it in the bin. His gesture pulled out tears from the users of the brand (some even called themselves Macnuts i.e. “mad” after Mac) confessing that they were capable of purchasing a product even if they didn’t need it, to support the company.

Grounded on an extremely powerful “personal legend” and supported by a charismatic leader able to give consistency to this legend – Jobs himself had an extremely “passionate” relation to his company, quitting it, then coming back to it to raise the bid for one-dollar salary. In short, Apple has proved that a tribal brand may reach up to the level of a Master brand.

But let us go back to the taxonomy proposed by Research International, noticing that the last category is that of Super brands. They possess important market shares without acting as myths of the category. Super brands involve a significant notoriety, a

positive emotional relation with the consumer, but they do not succeed in achieving either the force of Master brands or the intensity tribal brands are lived at, the prestige and capacity to be thought of locally, as in the case of the other two categories.

The difference between Master brands and Super brands is the difference between Samsung and Nokia, the Research International seems to suggest.

Nokia evokes an entire mythology of communication which was to re-define its meaning under the form of “connecting people”, generating a personal story of the brand which can be easily assimilated to the story of the mobile user. Conversely, Samsung looked like a dull brand. A few years ago, it was hard enough to say something of Samsung, despite the fact that it was a brand known to have existed a long time before. Yet, it did not represent an object either of desire or of the identity projections. Nonetheless, a strong enough personal story having global pertinence may seemingly propel it as one of the most powerful Master brands, more quickly than we would imagine. And here is what statistics say.

Nowadays occupying the fifth position in the world, as far as the value of the brand is concerned, between 2003- 2004 Nokia managed to lose 18% of its brand capital, this amount being tantamount to a downfall from 29.440bn USD to 24.041bn USD. The reason: it was the harmless Super brand Samsung itself, whose value was, during the same period of time, rising by 16% due to the fact that it succeeded in formulating what we called its *personal story*.

Here is how Interbrand summarized the reason of Samsung’s ascension: *By surpassing its image as cheap brand, which struck blows at the policy of prices of the Japan brand,*

*Samsung has become a chic brand overnight.*⁴ (my translation) And this happened while the legendary Nokia was losing significant percentages of its market share, coming under 30% of the world market for the first time after 2001.

The reason: its inability to go on with its story.

Nokia, seen not long ago as a cool brand, which placed technology in the service of those who want to be connected, having a trendy and playful look, seems to have suddenly failed to understand its consumers. It proved to be utterly uninterested in the segment of sliding lid mobile phones which, having been first invented by Motorola were lately popularized by Samsung and LG Electronics. The latter saw a surprising increase in the consumers' preferences, their market being estimated at about 40% (of the total amount of sales in 2004: 20% in Europe, 40% in the USA and 60% in Asia), considering that they first of all aimed at the upper part of the market. Moreover, Nokia has delayed the launching of new technologies such as built-in mobile phone cameras, colour displays or enhanced volume features of data transfer. By moving at a slow pace and contrary to the story it continued to tell in advertising, Nokia entered free fall losing, as in video games, some of its 'lives'.

Nevertheless, it looks like in the last few years Nokia has found its 'tone' again. After the 2003-2004 downfall, it succeeded in steadily going up ever since 2007, coming back to the position it had occupied in the first years of the decade in the years 2000-2001, becoming again the fifth global brand from the point of view of the value of the brand. Let us go back to the Research International study to make a final

observation. Namely that Master brands and Super brands experience an interesting relation to space, whereas for prestige brands spatial references are inexistent.

Even if we have been talking about the de-localization of Master brands and Super brands implicitly, the study still characterizes them through the existence of a tension between the need to maintain a global statute and the desire to adapt to local cultures.

This is a paradox generated by the way in which consumers relate to these brands which they equally want to grow global – because this thing is given by a certain type of aspirational consumption - but also keep them individualized in order not to be part of an undifferentiated homogeneous target public. These tensions are yet surpassed by the category of tribal brands, of which Research International say are part of the third wave of branding.

But let us explain this a little further. The first wave defines the brands of the nineteenth century.

This is the first stage at which brands seem to act as endorsers of the physical qualities of products. This is a stage where brands are more like trade names i.e. a kind of labels tagged on products, labels which allow the building-up of a simple association to the manufacturer, the country of origin and, intrinsically, to the quality of the products.

Well, this first stage of branding which still persists in the less-developed countries and which was also experienced by brands of "the golden age" in Romania, is surpassed by the second wave of branding, when the brand does not say only something about the product but about the user as well.

Thus, brands of the second wave are brands which aim at building-up affinities

⁴Biz Magazine, no.91, p.42;

between the product and its target public and, implicitly, the creation of several models of identification by means of which the brand may be assimilated to a consumption characterized by social significance.

The brands of prestige and Master brands are part of this wave, both categories aiming at communicating through consumption several features of their users.

Well, it looks like the more and more sophisticated profile of the modern consumer makes even this second wave of branding to be outrun. The homogeneity in addressing of the brands of the second wave and their inability to differentiate consumers have generated a third model of branding whose prototype are, as specified before, tribal brands.

Why? It is mainly due to their capacity to interact with consumers.

I remember that in his book, *Lector in fabula*, Umberto Eco was talking about the importance of blank spaces in the construction of texts, these blank spaces playing the part of inviting the reader to fill in the Swiss cheese-like gaps of the text with his own fictions. Well, this is the main characteristic of brands of the third wave. These are brands which consumers build up by themselves having the feeling of belonging.

But, they may be created due to the fact that they have not reached the redundancy of the Master brands or of the Super brands which had been talking so much about their values so that they turned tautological.

As a brand, to manage to preserve your blank spaces is probably the most difficult mission to accomplish.

All the more so as most of the brand managers consider that nothing should be left unsaid. And it is here that the big mistake

resides. One cannot love a brand if you know everything about it, the very same way as you cannot fall in love with a woman if she has no trace of mystery.

It is for this reason that, in general, tribal brands are most of the times brands in the first phase of their life cycle, brands taken in by experimentors who consider them trendy and with which they identify up to the moment when these brands minimize themselves. Or it may be – which happens more rarely – that brands exceeding the moment of their ripeness experience a mysterious re-launching as with the Hush Puppies shoes from the *Tipping Point*, which had the charm of a seductive widow.

Anyway, the Swiss cheese-like wholes must work to let consumers come in and out of the story as they please in order not to feel captive inside a fictional world, one which they may suddenly find it is no longer theirs.

But the problem comes from what you leave unsaid and from the way you deal with the gregarious volume which consumers will generate, to prevent it from turning against the brand.

There is an interesting story about Dunkin Donuts' which around 1999 remarked that a site presenting critical opinions on the brand appeared more frequently on search engines than the company's site. The response of Dunkin Donuts' was extremely normal. They tried to reply to complaints by sending direct e-mail messages to dissatisfied consumers offering those discounts and gratuities. From a critical site, this has turned into a client feedback service, eventually being even purchased by the company.

Nevertheless, in this way the brand closes its story. At this moment, it is more important to know how to keep the story open. What

Martin Lindstrom considered being a HSP type of brand (Holistic Selling Proposition) may represent a modality of this kind: *a true HSP brand cannot be logo-centric. Its power is embedded in every aspect of the brand. Its message, sound, smell, and touch let you know what it is.*

Established in this way, the brand offers more ways of access as well as more freedom

to his consumers. Since it is multisensorial and capable of being explored, it becomes exploitable in more directions. In this way, it allows the building-up of alliances, the developing of ranges or of sub-branding, starting from the same story yet stimulating various centres of branding.

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