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Article

How archetypal brands leverage consumers' perception: A qualitative investigation of brand loyalty and storytelling

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How archetypal brands leverage consumers' perception

A qualitative investigation of brand loyalty and storytelling

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ABSTRACT

Der folgende Beitrag behandelt Archetypen von Marken und deren Einfluss auf die Kundenwahrnehmung im Hinblick auf die Marken. Abgeleitet von der Hypothese, dass die bestehende Loyalität zum Markenimage einen stärkeren Effekt auf die Konsumenten erzeugt, werden Firmen in der Sportbekleidungsindustrie untersucht. Es werden Konsumentenverhalten und die Kundenbindung zu Marken porträtiert. Ein Persönlichkeitsvergleich von Nike und Adidas zeigt die Unterschiede in der Marktpositionierung auf. Zudem weist Markenführung durch Storytelling eine Möglichkeit auf, den Effekt der archetypischen Marke in der Marketing-Kommunikation wirksam einzusetzen. Wenn man Archetypen konsistent verwendet, können somit Firmen ihren Markenwert und die Kundenloyalität steigern.



Nowadays, many companies use archetypes – wittingly or unwittingly - to create their brands and marketing campaigns in many ways. This can be more successful when using archetypes consistently. However, only a few companies stick to one archetype from their foundation until the present. When in different campaigns differing archetypes are used, customers are getting confused about the unclear brand image (Mark and Pearson, 2001, p. 9) which weakens the brand's position. In times where products and their features can barely be distinguished, archetypes create a special form of differentiation to competitors (ibid., p. 10; Herskovitz and Malcolm, 2010, p. 23). Branding and the brand personality are therefore crucial for a company to be successful. This problem is relevant for managers and marketers in order to create powerful, successful and sustainable brands. The goal of this article is to find a relation between an archetypical brand image and the company's success. Brands should focus on their image as an important asset and stick loyal to their brand personality. Therefore, the question arises: Can archetypal brands leverage consumers' perception in the sportswear industry?

Brand Management

Brands are so ubiquitous in our everyday life that consumers establish a certain type of relationship with them. Consumers rely on those brands and engage with them in special ways. As a result, they feel a sense of commitment and belonging to those brands what contributes to passion and loyalty (DeChernatony, McDonald, and Wallace, 2011, p. 37). Branding and brand management are, therefore, a crucial point for companies in order to be successful. But what are the most successful brands doing differently or better than the others? Brands with high awareness and good performance create special trust among their consumers. This type of trust reveals in situations where the consumer feels a subjective tricky buying decision (Burmam et al., 2015, p. 2-5). Strong brands increase brand loyalty and brand retention of the customer group and strengthen

the competitive position of a company. Corporate brands need to show a consistent brand image throughout each touchpoint with the customer for the purpose of the desired recognition. Branding is no longer just about the service and product offering. It is about the company itself. Thus, the whole company depends on the brand image, uniqueness, credit of trust and value which derives from corporate branding (Esch, 2007, p. 4-7).

Creating a strong brand is based upon a combination of several related tangible and intangible assets of a company. Burmann describes that concept as identity-based brand leadership. The brand identity, which is the tangible asset of a company, complements the classic brand image. Those two elements of branding are in relation and dependent on each other. The relationship with the customer is so important for companies that all employees and the whole value chain has to fit with the customers' expectation. Company and brand names assure these relationships (DeChernatony, McDonald and Wallace, 2011, p. 17).

Brand positioning is another key factor for success. It means the differentiation of the own brand to competitive brands. Positioning attributes are based on the wishes and needs of the target group. Based on the positioning, the implementation of the corporate brand identity is derived in the desired direction. It is important to develop a core positioning which can slightly be extended for different countries or stakeholders (Esch, 2007, p. 56-57). The brand portfolio is another point of well-defined brands. The master brand is the key component of a company and the point of reference. Leveraging effects can be used for the master brand as an endorser or by strengthening the master by means of establishing and utilizing sub-brands. Sub-brands, such as product categories, modify the associations of the master brand and stretch it. In other words, to extend the brand into new segments. They can capture additional equity and are uniquely associated with the master brand. Therefore sub-brands can be placed in different productmarket segments and deal with conflicting brand strategies (ibid.).

Archetypes

Creating and establishing a brand needs a careful management of different assets. One of those assets is the meaning of a brand, e.g. to portray products with meaning. Archetypes can be used to symbolize a brand with a meaning. It's a brand's most valuable and priceless attribute (Mark and Pearson, 2001, p. 8-10). Deliberately utilizing brand meaning establishes customer loyalty, provides satisfaction and improves their day-to-day life (ibid., p. 45). Archetypal interpretive and behaviour pattern offer different emotional variances which can be used for a unique positioning of the brand (Gutjahr, 2015, p. 139). According to Mark and Pearson, companies should leverage the archetypal meaning of brands to awaken feelings in customers. Brands must fulfill the degree of quality and in the same way their meaning promise. By doing so, companies help their customers with useful products as with experiencing a sense or feeling. This sense provides the customer with the feeling that the brand is alive. The archetype express the meaning in a way that customers build a relationship with the brand and care about it (Mark and Pearson, 2001, p. 20-22).

Another justification why archetypes are so influential on persons is that they can relate them to characters in movies or stories. That archetypes base on shared human unconsciousness enhances the emotional factor. Therefore, archetypes are more than constructions of marketers and brand managers (Caldwell, Henry and Alman, 2010, p. 93-94). The interpretive pattern of archetypes has a global reach and effect on the experience and behaviour in the day-to-day life. This can be evaluated, for example by Priming-experiments (Gutjahr, 2015, p. 29).

In different stages of human life, everybody can find varying

archetypes. Those archetypes are the inner guide of the lifetime journey. According to Pearson, each of them bears a task, a lesson, and eventually a gift (2015, p. 7). All archetypes dwell in each person and together teaching them how to live. For instance, the Hero or Warrior within a person helps to set goals and thereby develop strategies which require discipline and courage. If archetypes are not active inside a person, it means he will skip some steps. In other words, if the Hero is missing, the person will not succeed in developing and conducting the strategy for mastering difficulties. How the archetypes are defined is culturally and individually influenced by the most active archetype in someone's life (Pearson, 2015, p. 7-9).

The Hero

The Hero is a powerful archetype who wants to leave a thumbprint on the world. He is often represented in stories as a fearless character with an own special power who is willing to take personal risk for changing the reality. According to Mark and Pearson, he provides structure in the daily life and therefore allows the average person to approach challenges, take risks and change their life (2001, p. 101). Companies which are using this archetype are ambitious and striving for achievement. Their aspiring question is, "Could I do this as well?" (ibid., p. 102).

The Hero archetype needs to have high self-confidence for the intense determination of succeeding in his goals. Even if the goal is scarcely virtuous

The Hero	
Desire:	prove one's worth through courageous and difficult action
Goal:	exert mastery in a way that improves the world
Fear:	weakness, vulnerability, "wimping out"
Strategy:	become as strong and powerful as you are capable of being
Trap:	arrogance, developing a need for there always be an enemy
Gifts:	competence and courage

Figure 1: The Hero archetype
Source: Mark and Pearson, 2001, p. 106.

or precious, the Hero is about winning at all costs. Thus, he takes a huge personal risk for achieving his aim. This archetype fits in our performance-oriented world, where people are supposed to take risks and develop capabilities to attain success (ibid., p. 102-103). The motto sums his characteristics up, “Where there’s a will, there’s a way” (ibid., p. 105). Figure 1 portrays the characteristics and behaviour of the Hero archetype.

A company who is using the Hero archetype successfully is Nike. Their “company’s central mission

the workplace, or other places where confrontations or problems require brave and undaunted deeds (2001, p. 106).

Nike As Archetypal Sport Brand

Nike was founded by athletes who loved competition and running and therefore promoted the runner as a heroic individual. Due to sports heroes as Michael Jordan, they pointed out that the best sportsmen wear Nike. Those heroic images arouse special desire in consumers. They want to wear

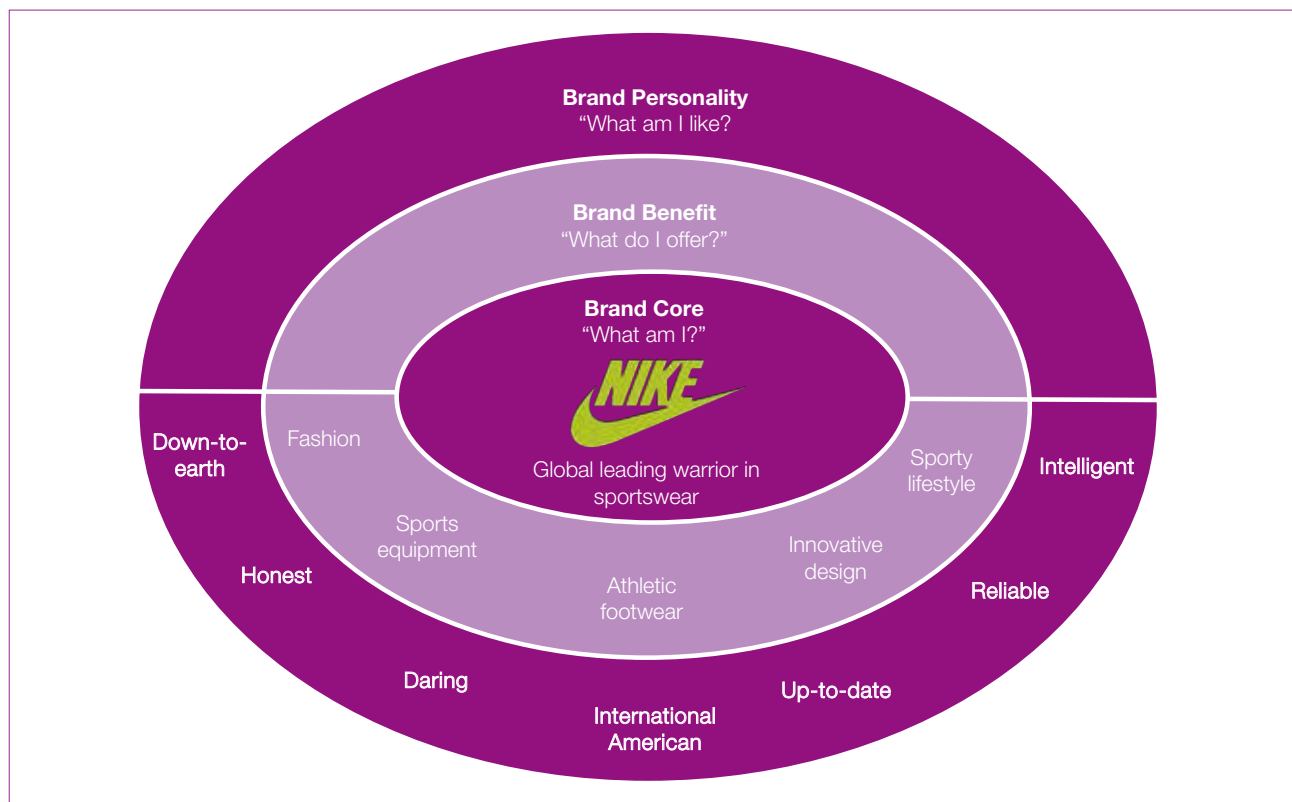


Figure 2: Nike's brand personality model
Source: own representation according to Homburg, 2014 p. 636

is to understand and inspire the soul of the athlete”. Due to their slogan, Nike encourages sportspeople to start and rise to challenges (ibid., p. 108). This characteristic relates to heroic behaviour. The Hero is overall possibly the most influential archetype. Roberts states, that for different product categories distinct archetypes are leading. He found out that for sports the leading archetype in general is the Hero (2010, p. 36). This research fits with Mark and Pearson’s declaration, that the Hero’s natural environment is the athletic contest, the battlefield,

Nike because they wish to have heroic qualities, not because they have those already (Mark and Pearson, 2001, p. 108-109). This heroic identity is what is so valuable for Nike. They can, for example, target particular shoes to different market segments and sports without diluting their brand identity. (ibid., p. 110)

Nike’s statement to “help people experience the emotion of competition, winning, and crushing competitors“ reflects its heroic identity (Hollensen and Opresnik, 2015, p. 141). The company’s mission

is to “bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world” in addition with “if you have a body, you’re an athlete” (Nike). Emphasising that everybody is or can be an athlete tempts consumer desire to become such a hero. Another aspect of the Hero archetype is that he is channeling peoples’ aggression and will into a positive outcome. It means rather athletic or economic competition instead of physical aggression (Mark and Pearson, 2001, p. 119). Nike is focussed on the individual athlete and all about winning and being the best. This was clearly stated in one of their ads “You don’t win silver, you lose gold” (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000, p. 189-190). Nike’s sponsorship program is directed more towards individual top athletes like Tiger Woods and Cristiano Ronaldo and their success. These heroic details lead to a highly emotional personality and a strong brand. All of those aspects helped Nike to become the world’s leading company in sportswear and one of the most valuable brands. Their assets and personality will be further analysed in a positioning model.

The brand positioning of Homburg is based upon three facets of a brand: the brand personality, the brand benefit, and the brand core (Homburg, 2014, p. 636). This model shows the three layers of the brand in a distinctive way surrounding each other. It visualises the combination of those components in a clear way and therefore helps to understand the distinction in this case. Along with the facets are questions characterising them. The brand personality - “What am I like?” - builds the outer layer of the onion model. In the middle layer the brand benefit can be described with – “What do I offer?”. The centre shows the brand core with the catching question – “Who am I?”. This model was used to represent Nike’s brand personality in figure 2. The characterisation of the model was done by the author, as such it is subjective.

The brand personality facets are derived from the brand personality framework of Jennifer Aaker (Aaker, 1997, p. 352). They are, in the opinion of the author, the best fitting for each of the brands. Therefore, not all facets of the original model are

depicted here. The personality characteristics of Nike are mainly in the “excitement” and “ruggedness” dimensions of the Aaker model. Those two dimensions match with the attributes of the Hero archetype. The excitement with the daring, spirited, and imaginative facets connects to the aspiration and the development of a plan for achievement. Ruggedness, including outdoorsy and tough, can represent the competitiveness and the willingness to fight the battle or to master the challenge.

Comparison with Adidas

The biggest competitor for Nike is Adidas. They were the former global leader in sports gear and athletic footwear until the early 1990’s. Nowadays they are still the second largest provider of sportswear and a global player. Adidas claims for themselves that, “we shape the future of sport because we believe sports shapes lives for the better”. This statement goes hand in hand with heroic attitudes as exacting standards and the potential to set boundaries (Mark and Pearson, 2001, p. 116). Connected with their brand attitude “impossible is nothing”, Adidas demonstrates the Hero archetype as well. According to Mark and Pearson, the Hero is suitable for a company e.g., if “you are the underdog and want to rival the competition”, “your product helps perform at their upper limit” or “your customer base identifies itself as good, moral citizens” (2001, p. 121). Thus, Adidas shows clear characteristics of a hero company. On the other hand, Adidas is more about teams, teamwork, team spirit and participation than individual success (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000, p. 186). They encourage everybody, not only sports stars to strive for competition by themselves or with the environment. Emotions are rather connected to competing than to success. Challenging oneself is exciting for playing well and not the reason. As a result, winning is the reward for Adidas (ibid.). These elements are still what Adidas distinguishes from Nike. In figure 3, we can see the brand personality model of Adidas.

The brand benefit of Adidas is quite similar to the one of Nike. They are in the same way fashionable



Figure 3: Adidas brand personality model
Source: Own representation according to Homburg, 2014 p. 636

and stand for a sporty lifestyle. However, in terms of design, Adidas can be seen as a rather modern and classic one than a really innovative one. In the case of brand personality, Adidas and Nike are quite different. Brand personality attributes of Adidas are also based on the most suitable of the Aaker model, but the dimensions are more balanced than the one of Nike. The sincerity dimension with the down-to-earth and honest facets are appropriate for the Hero, but it doesn't show his main character. It is similar for the competence with its facets reliable and intelligence. The aspects of Adidas personality are definitely important for a hero, but not necessarily the most important or influential ones. These dimensions are rather for being hard working and respectful. For Adidas, the excitement facets are daring and up-to-date. Adidas can rather be seen as the reliable, clean, and nice Hero. He is competing and fighting together with others as a team. But Adidas is lacking some crucial points of the Hero like for example, winning at all costs. In contrast, Nike is more the tough and brave fighting Hero who is earning his success with a lot of hard work. It is more about

the individual struggle and his success in the end.

How to use archetypes for branding

There are various ways for marketing and communicating a brand to consumers. In the case of an archetypal brand like the Hero, branding by storytelling seems to be a good one. It corresponds with the needs of postmodern consumers, who are using brands for staging and building their identity. Storytelling can on one hand help to differentiate a brand and on the other hand to build a strong brand identity which aspires consumers to participate in (Gutjahr, 2015, p. 151-152). The possibility is high that if a brand tells a story and uses an archetype, consumers will perceive and remember the message. In this way, it establishes a relationship with the consumer's personal life (Kroeber-Riel and Gröppel-Klein, 2013, p. 218). Most stories about heroes experiencing a roller-coaster of emotions. A steady twist of despair and hope, fear and courage, weakness and strength, and doubt with security fosters the empathy of the audience (Gutjahr, 2015, p. 155). By focusing on the personality, marketing methods will

always be memorable, even if they follow varying schemes (Herskovitz and Malcolm, 2010, p. 26). Those stories are often following the same stages or patterns. Campbell outlines the hero's journey in different phases from myths and narratives. This can be condensed in five stages, illustrated in figure 4 (Campbell and Estés, 2004, p. 34-35). At the beginning of the story is the call for a challenge. The hero is aspired to achieve it and crosses the first threshold as he steps into the competition. A big challenge is always hard to complete and full of ups and downs. For the hero there is always a point in the story where he is

in consumers and builds a stronger bond between them and the company (Herskovitz and Malcolm, 2010, p. 21). Images of brands are in the consumers minds and there is the storytelling construed and connected with emotions (Gutjahr, 2015, p. 153). A variety of different stories can be told with a consistent persona. Consumers appreciate this stability, believe it and identify themselves with a brand persona which statements and actions are equivalent (Herskovitz and Malcolm, 2010, p. 23). Becoming such an iconic brand with a strong customer relationship and loyalty needs permanent work on the consumer imagination,

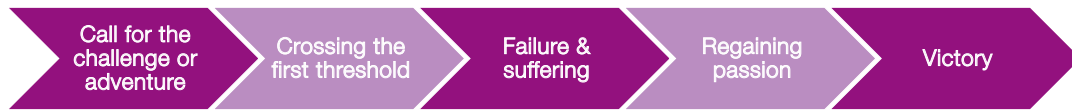


Figure 4: The hero's journey
Source: Own representation according to Campbell and Estés, 2004, p. 34-35.

almost failing and suffering pain. In the next step, the hero is regaining his power, strength, and passion which finally helps him to achieve the goal and to accomplish the mission. Conflicts and the decisions which find answers to the conflict are mostly important for branding scenarios (Gutjahr, 2015, p. 153).

Nike is using this story scenario regularly in their promotions. The quest of consumers for the hero often starts with an inner conflict. Overcoming the inner villain who is lazy and saying “no” to sports

illustrated in figure 5.

Using an enduring brand archetype which is shaping consumer imagination with different stories is key for becoming a really iconic brand. This transformation is rather cyclical than linear because the brand has to present regular adaptations of their storytelling. A company which is such an iconic brand is Nike. They experience a strong consumer relationship and loyalty due to their impressive representation of the hero archetype in combination with the marketing of successful athletes like



Figure 5: Brand archetype-icon framework
Source: Tsai, 2006, p. 652.

and the awakening of the hero with accepting the challenge is summarized in their slogan “Just do it.”. Those easy identifiable and memorable ads of brand personalities are what triggers emotions

Michael Jordan. The use of memorable ads and taglines, as well as their well-known logo, are contributing to this success. But the major success driver is the constant bond of their products with

the atmosphere of the successful performance surrounding them. For this association, it does not matter whether they are used by a weekend hero or a major sports star. The various success stories of Nike's personality are based on lots of smaller or larger triumphs (Herskovitz and Malcolm, 2010, p. 25).

Conclusion

The study reveals, that using an archetype for branding can influence consumers and their connection towards a brand. Showing a strong and clear image and providing the product with a meaning strengthens the consumer's relation and their brand likeability. But utilizing brand archetypes needs a clear understanding of the brand's personality. Companies should be aware of their personality and therefore using a consistent archetype with different advertising stories. Emotional factors attract consumers and establish a strong relationship between them and the company. In this way, a consumer identifies himself with the respective company and their products.

Archetypes are very powerful for brands and their representation to the consumers. Hence, companies should put more focus on their archetypal image and personality to create successful brands. Some limitations of this article are related to the fact that the success of Nike can not only depend on the brand archetype. Other factors as for example, higher spendings on marketing or the appeal of the American culture can also be important when it comes to their success.

Using the right branding approach to set the brand apart from competitors is getting even more important in the future as product function differences are vanishing. Archetypal branding offers also a great opportunity of distinction from the cheaper competition of Asia and other emerging markets.



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