

Analysis of the impact of inspirational stories on consumer consumption

Xucong Hu

Abstract:

In recent years, more and more enterprises have further enhanced consumers' brand identification by telling "inspirational" brand stories. An inspirational brand story in marketing practice has a strong demonstration, incentive, publicity function, and value. The value dimension is a multi-directional, multi-angle, and multi-level condition and concept to judge, explain, evaluate, and determine the value of a thing. Consumers will accept the ideals, beliefs, and values described and conveyed by the content of inspirational brand stories and enhance their

Keywords: Inspirational, brand story, value dimension, consumption motivation, brand identity

identification and love for the brand. Personalization is short for character design. Studies on plays, films, stories, etc., have shown that underrepresented traits such as soundness and gender strongly influence the acceptability of literary works. A series of excellent brands have built inspirational brand stories with positive value, molded inspirational people with characteristics to carry out more brand value transmission, and won many consumers' brand recognition.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background on consumer behavior and impulsive buying

Consumer behavior is a multifaceted field of study that delves into buyers' decision-making processes, preferences, and actions in the marketplace (Solomon, 2014). A particularly intriguing aspect of consumer behavior is impulsive buying, a spontaneous and often emotional purchasing decision made without premeditation (Verplanken & Herabadi, 2001). Such impulsive purchases are driven by many factors, from external stimuli like persuasive advertisements to internal triggers such as mood swings or a desire for instant gratification. Understanding the nuances of impulsive buying can equip marketers with invaluable insights to craft compelling strategies that resonate with target audiences.

1.2 Significance of brand storytelling

Brand storytelling is not just a marketing tactic; it is a profound way to connect with consumers on a deeper emotional and psychological level (Escalas, 2004). By weaving a narrative around a brand, marketers can elevate it beyond mere product attributes, creating an emotive bond between the consumer and the brand (Woodside, 2010). This connection engenders trust, fosters brand loyalty, and can dramatically influence purchasing decisions. More than ever, in an era of information overload, a compelling brand story stands out, providing consumers with meaning, context, and a reason to engage

with and remain loyal to a brand.

2. The Power of Storytelling

2.1. Human connection to stories

From ancient cave paintings to modern-day films, stories have been an intrinsic part of human culture and cognition (Brown, 2008). They serve as vessels for conveying values, traditions, and lessons, helping us make sense of our world and our place within it. Neuroscientific studies suggest that narratives activate various parts of the brain, allowing listeners to virtually experience events and emotions described, fostering empathy and understanding (Mar & Oatley, 2008). This deep-rooted affinity for stories makes the narrative a powerful tool, capable of building bridges between abstract concepts, products, or brands and the personal experiences of individuals.

2.2. Storytelling in marketing and its evolution

Historically, marketing centered on product features and benefits. However, as markets saturated and competition intensified, the emphasis shifted towards creating memorable experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Storytelling emerged as a pivotal tool, enabling brands to transcend mere transactional relationships and craft emotional bonds with consumers (Lundqvist et al., 2013). Over time, with the rise of digital platforms, brand narratives became multidimensional, interactive, and increasingly tailored to individual consumer experiences. The evolution from mere advertising to narrative marketing underscored the recognition of stories as invaluable assets in capturing attention, conveying values,

and engendering loyalty.

2.3 Branding as a form of storytelling

At its core, branding revolves around crafting a unique and memorable identity for a product or organization. In this quest for differentiation, storytelling emerges as a transformative tool (Delgado-Ballester & Fernández-Sabiote, 2016). Through narrative, brands articulate their origins, values, and aspirations, transforming intangible qualities into relatable tales that resonate with consumers. Successful branding stories not only differentiate products but also inspire, motivate, and foster emotional connections (Fog et al., 2005). Hence, branding is no longer just about logos or taglines; it is about constructing a coherent narrative that captures the essence and promise of a brand.

3. Factors that Make a Brand Story Inspirational

3.1 Authenticity and relatability

In the digital age, consumers are increasingly discerning, seeking genuine and trustworthy brand interactions (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). Authenticity in brand storytelling has become paramount. Genuine stories, anchored in truth and brand ethos, foster trust and deepen consumer engagement (Beverland, 2005). Relatability, on the other hand, ensures that the narrative resonates with the audience's experiences, emotions, and aspirations. When consumers see themselves in a brand's story, they are more likely to form an emotional connection and loyalty. Hence, authenticity and relatability stand as foundational pillars in creating impactful and lasting brand narratives.

3.2 Overcoming challenges or adversities

In the digital age, consumers are increasingly discerning, seeking genuine and trustworthy brand interactions (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). Authenticity in brand storytelling has become paramount. Genuine stories, anchored in truth and brand ethos, foster trust and deepen consumer engagement (Beverland, 2005). Relatability, conversely, ensures that the narrative resonates with the audience's experiences, emotions, and aspirations. When consumers see themselves in a brand's story, they are likelier to form an emotional connection and loyalty. Hence, authenticity and relatability are foundational to creating impactful and lasting brand narratives.

3.3 Establishing a mission or higher purpose

Brands with a clear mission or higher purpose transcend the transactional realm, offering consumers a cause to align with or a vision to believe in (Sisodia et al., 2007). This transcendent purpose often taps into broader societal or environmental goals, elevating the brand's role beyond mere commerce. When consumers identify

with this mission, their allegiance shifts from passive purchasing to active advocacy (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Such purpose-driven storytelling can foster deeper trust, engagement, and brand loyalty as consumers derive functional benefits from their purchases and a sense of fulfillment and alignment with larger ideals.

3.4 Involving consumers in the brand's journey

Modern brands recognize the immense value of not just telling their story but making consumers an integral part of that narrative (Schmitt, 2012). By involving consumers in pivotal moments or decisions, brands can create a sense of shared ownership and co-creation. This engagement strategy, which can manifest through interactive campaigns, feedback loops, or community initiatives, fosters deeper connections and trust (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004). When consumers feel they play a role in the brand's evolving story, they become more emotionally and often financially invested, further cementing their loyalty and advocacy.

4. Mechanisms by which Inspirational Stories Influence Consumer Behavior

4.1 Emotional resonance and empathy

Emotion is a potent driver in decision-making processes, often acting as the bridge between brand stories and consumer response (Zaltman, 2003). Compelling brand narratives elicits emotions, allowing consumers to emotionally resonate and empathize with the brand's journey, values, or challenges. This emotional connection can significantly influence purchasing behavior; as consumers tend to gravitate towards brands they feel emotionally tied to (Thompson, Rindfleisch, & Arsel, 2006). By evoking empathy through storytelling, brands enhance recall and recognition and foster an environment where consumers are more inclined to make impulsive, emotionally driven purchases.

4.2 Reinforcing trust and credibility

Trust forms the foundation of consumer-brand relationships. Through authentic storytelling, brands can emphasize their credibility, building and reinforcing trust with consumers (Erdem & Swait, 2004). Narratives that highlight a brand's consistency, commitment, and values over time make the brand seem more reliable, thus encouraging consumers to place their faith in the brand's offerings (Möller, 2006). Trust, once established, acts as a catalyst for spontaneous purchasing decisions, as consumers feel more confident in the quality and integrity of the brand they are engaging with, often leading to increased shopping impulses.

4.3 Evoking aspirational qualities

Through adept storytelling, brands possess the unique

ability to conjure a world that consumers aspire to be a part of. This aspirational world, often painted with hues of sophistication, success, or adventure, resonates with individuals' intrinsic desires to elevate themselves, either socially, intellectually, or emotionally (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). An individual's consumption patterns are not just motivated by their immediate needs but also by the person they wish to become, the life they envision for themselves, and the values they desire to be associated with. For instance, luxury brands have historically utilized aspirational branding to an artful degree. They present tales not just of opulence but also of heritage, craftsmanship, and exclusivity. When consumers purchase a luxury item, they are not just buying a product but an entrance into a coveted circle, an emblem of a lifestyle many yearn for but only a few can access. This aspiration-driven purchasing behavior is a testament to the power of storytelling that evokes qualities individuals yearn for.

Furthermore, brands craft narratives around discipline, achievement, and transformation in fitness and health. These stories cater to consumers' optimal health, body image, and overall well-being aspirations. Purchasing a product or service in this space becomes synonymous with taking a step closer to their ideal self. For aspirational branding to be effective, the projected qualities must be believable and attainable to a certain extent. Overly fantastical narratives risk alienating consumers if they feel the portrayed lifestyle is too far removed from reality (Weinberger & Wallendorf, 2012). Thus, brands must strike a delicate balance, offering a desirable and reachable vision. By tapping into the power of aspirational storytelling, brands can effectively drive impulsive purchasing behaviors. These stories do not just sell products; they sell dreams, ambitions, and pathways to potential futures.

5. Empirical Evidence

Based on psychologist Bandura's OLT theory (Observational Learning Theory), narrative transmission to self-efficacy and then to the chain intermediary mechanism of brand identity explores the impact of companies using non-sound personas in inspirational brand stories on consumer brand identity.

5.1 Experiment Purpose

The experiment proves that the non-sound person in the inspirational brand story can stimulate consumers' brand identity more than the healthy person and verifies that self-efficacy plays a mediating role between the soundness of the person in the inspirational brand story and the consumer's brand identity.

5.2. Hypothesis

1a: Inspirational brand stories. Non-healthy persona

design can stimulate consumers to identify with the brand more than healthy persona design, thereby promoting consumption

1b: Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between human integrity and consumer brand identity in inspirational brand stories.

5.3 Experiment Goals

The experiment aims to verify the impact of the soundness of inspirational brand story characters on brand identity. Confirm Hypothesis 1a and Hypothesis 1b. That is, non-sound people in inspirational brand stories can stimulate consumers' positive attitudes and preferences towards brands more than healthy people and verify the soundness of self-efficacy in inspirational brand stories—the intermediary role between consumers and brand recognition.

5.4 The Testee Chooses

The experiment recruited 65 valid participants (aged 19-34 years old, $M = 26.05$, $SD = 6.486$, the female proportion was 51.55%) in Beijing's Wangfujing business district to complete a series of brand survey activities about shampoo. Participants were randomly assigned to 2 groups (non-disabled vs. able-bodied), and the sample size of each group was (n non-disabled = 33, n able-bodied = 32).

5.5 Experiment Settings

The experiment created a virtual shampoo brand, "Le Young," which shows the difference in consumers' perception of the brand by adding different personal characteristics. First, introduce participants to a brand story and an inspirational brand story. Secondly, for the group of non-sound people, the brand story "You Can Do (version for non-sound people)" will be given to the participants as disabled deaf and hard-of-hearing poor, disabled girls; for the group of healthy people, participants will be given the brand story "You Can Do It (Sound People Version)" is set as a healthy and poor little girl.

Among them, the inspirational brand story of the non-disabled group is a story of a poor deaf or hard-of-hearing girl overcoming various difficulties on the road to success and finally succeeding. The inspirational brand story of the Sound Human Design group is a story of a poor, healthy little girl who overcomes various difficulties on the road to success and finally succeeds. In order to control the influencing factors of the experiment, apart from the difference in the physiological health of the main characters, the plot, text length, and reading time limit of the two stories are the same. In this way, participants can perceive the difference in self-efficacy perception and brand identity brought about by the difference in the soundness of inspirational brand stories. Then, let the subjects fill out the questionnaire and answer it.

5.5 Experiment Survey Settings

Question Number	Observation Index
SE1	Are you so inspired by the characters in the story that you think you can always solve a problem if you try your best?
SE2	Are you so inspired by the characters in the story that you think there is a way to get what you want, even if others are against you?
SE3	Are you inspired by the characters in the story and think it's easy for you to stick to your ideals and achieve your goals?
SE4	Do you feel inspired by the characters in the story and confident that you can cope effectively with anything that comes your way?
SE5	Do you feel inspired by the characters in the story and think that with your intelligence, you can handle the unexpected?
SE6	Are you so inspired by the characters in the story that you think you could solve most of the problems if you put in the necessary effort?
SE7	Are you inspired by the characters in the story and think that you can face difficulties calmly because you can trust your ability to deal with them?
SE8	Have you ever been inspired by the characters in a story that you can usually find several solutions to a difficult problem?
SE9	Have you ever been inspired by the characters in a story that you can usually think of something to do when there's trouble?
SE10	Are you inspired by the characters in the story and feel that no matter what happens to you, you will be able to handle it?

5.6. Experiment Data Analysis and Research

Test hypothesis 1a

In this experiment, a one-way analysis of variance was used for data statistics to verify that the soundness of the personal set in motivational brand stories would significantly affect consumers' self-efficacy. An independent sample T-test was used to verify the correlation analysis. T-tests use T-distribution theory to infer how likely a difference is to occur, thus comparing whether the difference between two averages is significant. The statistical formula of the independent sample T-test is:

$$t = \frac{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}{\sqrt{\frac{(n_1 - 1)S_1^2 + (n_2 - 1)S_2^2}{n_1 + n_2 - 2} \left(\frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2}\right)}}$$

S12 and S22 are two sample variances. n1 and n2 are two sample sizes. The results of data analysis showed that participants in the non-able-bodied group tended to think that they had higher self-efficacy (M non-able-bodied = 4.376, SD = 0.967; M healthy person = 3.834, SD = 1.063, t (64) = 4.623, p < 0.05, d = 0.533), as shown in Table 5.3. At the same time, participants in the non-able-bodied group obtained significantly higher brand identity than those in the able-bodied group (M non-able-bodied = 4.546, SD = 1.092; M sound = 3.688, SD = 1.749, t (64) = 5.662, p < 0.05, d = 0.588), hypothesis 1a is supported.

Brand Story	Non-Able-Bodied group (M±SD)	Healthy Group (M±SD)	t	Cohen's d
Self-Efficacy	4.376±0.967	3.834±1.063	4.623 *	0.533
Brand Identity	4.546±1.092	3.688±1.749	5.662 *	0.588

Note:* p < 0.05,** p < 0.01

Test hypothesis 1b

The confidence interval is calculated at a predetermined significance level, which is set to 0.05 in most cases. The confidence is $(1-\alpha)$ or $100 \times (1-\alpha) \%$. If $\alpha = 0.05$, the confidence is 0.95 or 95%. The common formula for calculating confidence intervals is as follows:

$$\Pr(c_1 \leq \mu \leq c_2) = 1 - \alpha \Pr(c_1 \leq \mu \leq c_2) = 1 - \alpha$$

In this formula, α is the significance level, and Pr is the probability. Motivational brand stories created by people with different levels of health affect the arousal of individual self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.541$; CI = 0.038 to 1.045). After adding the mediating variable (self-efficacy), the soundness of the personage in motivational brand stories had no significant direct influence on consumer brand identity ($\beta = 0.437$; CI = -0.195 to 1.069), indicating that self-efficacy plays a complete mediating role in the relationship between the perceived soundness and consumer brand identity in motivational brand stories, verifying hypothesis 1b.

6.1. Conclusion

The following three conclusions are drawn from the study:

1. Inspirational brand stories using disabled storytellers can bring consumers a stronger spiritual experience and value change. Brand stories implanted with imperfect characters can form strong self-efficacy in consumer psychology and thus enhance consumers' brand identity.
2. The degree of individual perception of the authenticity of inspirational brand stories has a moderating effect on consumers' brand identification. Only in the case of high authenticity perception the imperfect inspiring brand storyteller has a significant impact on consumers' brand identity.
3. This paper verifies the establishment of a causal chain model from the soundness of the inspirational brand storyteller to narrative transmission, then to self-efficacy, and then to consumer brand identity in the case of high individual perception of authenticity, and further proves the influence of inspirational brand storyteller

soundness on consumer brand identity. The relationship is explained through the dual mediating mechanism of narrative transmission and self-efficacy.

Reference

- Bhattacharya, C. B., & Sen, S. (2003). Consumer-company identification: A framework for understanding consumers' relationships with companies. *Journal of Marketing*, 67(2), 76-88.
- Booker, C. (2004). The seven basic plots: Why we tell stories. Continuum.
- Erdem, T., & Swait, J. (2004). Brand credibility, brand consideration, and choice. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(1), 191-198.
- Escalas, J. E., & Bettman, J. R. (2003). You are what they eat: The influence of reference groups on consumers' connections to brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 13(3), 339-348.
- Luthans, F., & Youssef, C. M. (2007). Emerging positive organizational behavior. *Journal of Management*, 33(3), 321-349.
- Möller, K. (2006). Role of competencies in creating customer value: A value-creation logic approach. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 35(8), 913-924.
- Prahalad, C. K., & Ramaswamy, V. (2004). Co-creation experiences: The next practice in value creation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(3), 5-14.
- Schmitt, B. (2012). The consumer psychology of brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 22(1), 7-17.
- Sisodia, R., Wolfe, D. B., & Sheth, J. N. (2007). *Firms of endearment: How world-class companies profit from passion and purpose*. Wharton School Publishing.
- Thompson, C. J., Rindfleisch, A., & Arsel, Z. (2006). Emotional branding and the strategic value of the doppelgänger brand image. *Journal of Marketing*, 70(1), 50-64.
- Weinberger, M. F., & Wallendorf, M. (2012). Intracommunity gifting at the intersection of contemporary moral and market economies. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39(1), 74-92.
- Zaltman, G. (2003). *How customers think: Essential insights into the mind of the market*. Harvard Business Press.