

STORYTELLING IN COMMERCIAL WORLD & BUSINESS: STORIES THROUGH BRANDS AND IMPORTANCE OF STORIES THROUGH NEW MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Everyone has a story. So do products and brands. The iconic ones have a more inspiring story than the rest but there certainly a story to all. We can distinguish the stories that brands tell through various categories or to the target group it appeals to but the most successful ones are those who transpire an emotion more than the product or service.

While scientific reports have proved that humans are hardwired to listen to stories. Brands have left no stone unturned to use that fact well. The better told story is the one with which we emotionally connect to and in turn influences our buying preferences. For example if you take the sports megabrand NIKE, more than the product they sell their attitude and the confidence. It's basically about how you tell what you are, first; and what you sell, second as words trump over reality or the products and services often.

Taking another example how the Indian watch maker Titan, has its tune well known by all, it's the perfect choice for special occasions for Indians and has been established that way through the stories that it narrates, which makes it special to the customers.

In this paper I wish to explore the power of storytelling for iconic brands and how they influence the consumer buying behaviour, and become a part of their life, becoming quintessential.

Keywords

Story, Emotion, Brand, Product, Influence, Quintessential

1. Introduction

As a child one of our first learning experiences is through listening to stories. Be it fairytales or stories with moral values, we learn something from each one of them. And as it's the way we have grown up, we have got hardwired to listen to stories. By listening to a story what essentially happens is that an emotional bond is created with it. We connect to the character or the story by visualizing it in real life and trying to associate ourselves or the people we know with it or with the society to form a strong emotional bond, as if the story is our own.

Like for example we very vividly remember the character and its situations and relate to it or feel for it. Be it tackling difficulties like little red riding hood or Cinderella from our childhood or Being a hero like Harry Potter from our teenage days, we try to look for ourselves in our characters. We keep looking for ourselves in various stories; which come naturally to us. The idea of trying to relate and connect is a psychological process.

Our brains are programmed to recognize patterns of information (human faces, letters, music notes, etc.) and assign them meanings. Stories, too, are recognizable patterns, and we use them to find meaning in the world around us. We see ourselves in them, and the stories we hear become personal to us. And brands take advantage of this information.

Branding is a concept that has been existent from a very long time. In the early societies the skin of farm animals were burnt and an iron mark was made to show the ownership. In many societies criminals were branded to show that they should not be trusted. In Africa tribes were branded to identify themselves with their groups. This basic principle of identification slowly emerged into commercial business. Soap was one of the first branded commercial products.

The first brands simply put a name on a product and it identified the product. In the process of branding, after 1970 marketers attempted to associate certain ideas with their products. Thus the applications of brand identity and brand loyalty slowly emerged. After 1980s, companies started realizing the power of brands. Brand equity and brand assets have become important concepts of the day. Now, branding has become an indispensable aspect of any business.

It has to be articulated in the strategic policies of companies in creating 'differences' and gain a competitive edge. A brand is the sum of tangible and intangible associations. Brands are associated with identification, guarantee, mark of integrity, reputation, trust, expectations, etc. The process of creating these associations is branding.

2. CONSUMER PSYCHOLOGY AND ASSOCIATION WITH STORIES

Consumers think with both their rational and emotional brains. Studies suggest that when we buy, it's for emotional reasons. Logic comes into play when we try to justify the money we have (or are about to) spend — especially when we're giving into our wants. What we buy is out of our impulsive emotion and that emotion is usually formed by our life experiences, our learning's and

believes of needs and wants we hold in our mind. Most of this is shaped by our experiences and others experiences, usually in the form of a story. Brands also try to use this information and try and trap us with their story by creating a bond with us and manipulating our emotional decision making.

Here is what Psychology Today¹ study says about our shopping habits:-

fMRI neuro-imagey shows that when evaluating brands, consumers primarily use emotions (personal feelings and experiences) rather than information (brand attributes, features, objective facts).

Advertising research reveals that emotional responses to an ad has greater influence on a consumer's intent to buy an ad (more so than the ad's content)

According to the Advertising Research Foundation, 'likeability' is the measure that best predicts whether an advertisement will increase a brand's sales.

Positive emotions toward a brand have far greater influence on consumer loyalty than trust and other judgments.

Emotions are one reason why we gravitate toward brand name products over generics — big brands pump a steady stream of advertising dollars into branding initiatives.

The following are the five major points which describe the core functioning of how associations are formed with brands2:-

Human memory is story based by default: Information is indexed, stored, and retrieved in the form of stories. A story is useful because it comes with many indices i.e., touch points to the lives of listeners/viewers or to others that cause implicit and/or explicit awareness and emotional connection/understanding in the minds of listeners/ viewers.

A substantial amount of information stored in and retrieved from memory is episodic: Stories that include inciting incidents, experiences, outcomes/evaluations, and summaries/nuances of person-to-person and person and-brand relationships within specific contexts.

Retrieving, reliving, or repeat watching of stories results in what Aristotle refers to as "proper pleasure": Watching, retrieving, and telling stories enables the learner (sometimes with the assistance of the trainer but not necessarily the protagonist) to experience one or more archetypal myths.

Specific brands and products often play crucial roles enabling consumers to achieve the proper pleasure that results in a consumer mentally: The brand–consumer storytelling and pleasure outcome builds on the idea "that people need help in finding what makes them happy, and this is where marketing comes in

Individuals seek clarity, to make sense of prior conversations, events, and outcomes from others and themselves by telling stories: "How do I know what I think until I hear what I say?" This partly summarizes this proposition. Story repetition is often a plea for clarity that may be achievable in part by recognizing that the drama in the story is one illustration of one or more specific archetypes.

3. BRANDS WHICH HAVE SET THEMSELVES APART BY STORYTELLING

Products take on symbolic meaning and we buy them as much for their physical benefits as their symbolic or non-functional ones. This is self evident when we look at 'badge' products, that is, products which we use in public for whose symbolic meaning rubs off on ourselves in the eyes of the beholder. When a person buys a pair of jeans, he is not only buying denim pants but a label which he will display to the world, be it Levis, it has a certain meaning to it which is attached to it. A symbolic one for which he is ready to pay more amount than he would have paid for a similar product. This shows how a product influences a customer, emotionally. And these emotional decisions are influenced by the stories that we have heard and are told by the brands.

The EY Social Media Marketing India Trends study reveals that brands across industries have realised the significance of social media and its peculiar demands. Last year, social media constituted 18% of online promotional spends, which stood at Rs 495 crore, up from R295 crore. About 90% of organisations reached out to in this study are planning to spend as much as 15% of their annual marketing budget exclusively on social media, up from 78% organizations³.

In India, social media marketing has long been considered to be the pre-occupation of next generation brands. A watch brand or a radio cab service or an online ecommerce site needs to be 'socially charged up' because by definition, they are millennial brands—run by millennials and catering to millennials.

Popular brands in India like Maggi even in the time of crisis, never closed the doors of communication with its consumers. In fact, it serenaded them with tribute videos showing gratitude to its fans that were heavy on storytelling and emotional overtones. Maggi has been systematically rolling out films in each phase of its ban status. It has also ensured to address varied consumer segments in its video series – young boys and girls living in hostels, bachelor pads to the Indian moms who've been making Maggi for their kids ever since it's been there. Nestle India had rolled out a series of short films hash tagged #WeMissYouToo when it waited for the test results. Dedicated to all the fans who supported and stood by the brand, there was a Maggi fanboy/fangirl in each of the videos, who badly missed their favourite noodle. They are seen making a plea to Maggi, as if it were their long lost friend – "Come back, man!", "Ab a bhi jao", "kab wapas aayega yaar?", "We miss you Maggi", etc. This was how the connect remained through the simple stories which common people said and it really connected with the people.

¹ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/inside-the-consumer-mind/201302/how-emotions-influence-what-we-buy>

² Brand–Consumer Storytelling Theory and Research: Introduction to a Psychology & Marketing Special Issue; Arch G. Woodside

³ <https://www.financialexpress.com/industry/firing-the-social-media-salvo/142942/>

The story of a stammering comedian premiered online and generated a flurry of social conversations. The comedian turned a disadvantage into a gift and sparked off more than 5 million views online. The campaign was ranked amongst the top 10 YouTube ads in India in 2014. The ad was created by Nestle Foods, for its coffee brand Nescafe. This became immensely popular with the audience just like their other stories which immediately connected with the common people. The key is to have simple yet passionate and impactful stories.

4. THE EVOLUTION OF THE ART OF STORYTELLING

Storytelling is ever evolving. It cannot remain the same just like other things. And thus the key is to keep evolving with time, which is what matters.

The way we consume information has been revolutionized and thus consumers have become smarter. Technology being the major reason for this, which is updated every hour, it's difficult to be with the the public space of information is cramped with date and easy access to it. Consumers now have the ability to look for credibility of the product or service and thus it very important to also not rely on storytelling. As the cardinal principle of advertisement and public relation says, one can have a amazing advertisement or public relation campaign but if the product or service is not good in the first place, there is no way the product will continue to sell.

If we go on to analyze the various products which have the core of branding as their main principle then they will try to tell their story in a way which is unique and touches an individual's emotion. The best and most celebrated ads have always been those that tell great stories because the best creative's know the key to winning over consumers is to share stories that are worthy of their time. Audiences have always had the power to skip ads. Those of us old enough to remember a world without remote controls know that skipping ads was as simple as heading to the kitchen for a snack during the commercial break. Or heading to the bathroom to, um, fix your hair.

If we're in search of a narrative thread, the last 20 years in this business have been about one thing: consumer empowerment. Every new media technology that has come along since has only increased the power of the person. Even the technologies we don't like. Some 200 million people around the world employ ad blockers to rid their feeds of thousands of ads every month. But even as they try to shoot the messenger, brands and publishers can't avoid the message: People block ads because advertising has become more annoying and less tolerable.

While ad avoidance has always been an issue, there's a reason we were able to largely ignore it for decades. Advertising was viewed by many as a necessary evil, the price consumers paid to access free content. The end result of all these factors: We now consume only what we want, when we want, where we want and how we want it. And if we want it. That's a good thing for audiences. But it hasn't been a good thing for advertisers because it diminishes a brand's ability to interrupt the content we're trying to consume so they can tell us how great they are.

The more we block them, the more they come flooding in with daily messages that greet us on every surface and every screen. Yet, the flood of logos seems less like proof that advertising remains a powerful cultural force and more like a desperate attempt by advertisers to diminish the power technology has bestowed on consumers.

Brands such as Red Bull, GE, Marriott, Pepsi, Taco Bell and more are making significant investments in content studios designed to fund original programming to compete with the best of what TV and the web have to offer⁴. Like Coke studio is another example, it doesn't exactly make stories but it's a part of many stories and thus people connect to it instantly. This subtle marketing of the brands is what is more desirable as the audience has also become more content conscious. One cannot just talk about the brand, its ancillary now; the main task is to connect with the audience and make the brand a part of their life, just features, advantages and benefits do not work its emotions that do.

5. CHANGE REQUIRED IN STORYTELLING IN CONTEMPORARY TIME

Storytelling has been alive for centuries—perhaps dating back to the very beginning of time. From early cave painting depicting rituals to beautifully illustrated fairy tales, we've developed many ways over the years to keep audiences entertained and our methods of communication keep on changing.

With technology helping brands to take their consumers on a more interactive and engaging journey, the marketing process has ramped up a notch. Immersive storytelling is expected to become increasingly powerful. This is not a new phenomenon, as brands and organizations have been creating a compelling experience for their audience for decades, through engaging content, interactive images and interesting videos on their websites and social media profiles.

What is new, however, is the growing use of technology and the internet to create such experiences. So much so that the use of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) have become inseparable from this term. Immersive storytellers use the latest technologies to include superior-quality images, videos, sounds and games to grab audience attention and give them an immersive experience. Companies are investing heavily into giving prospective customers a near real-life look at their products. Until storytelling with the help of VR and AR becomes mainstream, it will remain extremely costly and within reach of only the biggest brands around the world.

For content creators in India, the potential of VR and immersive media ads is immense, enabling brands to experiment and redefine storytelling while driving tangible results. And the ability to access the technology is no longer a pipe dream: Marketers can sign up for VR for Brands for resources, including VR equipment, training, and post-production support. By striking while the iron's hot, savvy brands can establish themselves at the forefront of the VR revolution and deliver fresh, innovative experiences to today's increasingly hard-to-engage consumers.

Print media, television and the internet provide a two-dimensional experience. On the other hand, immersive storytelling gives the audience a sense of actual presence, which completely transforms the experience. Consumers become a part of the environment

⁴ <https://www.digitas.com/en-ae/insights/why-brands-need-to-skip-the-ads-and-start-telling-stories>

with the ability to react to events they encounter. Surveys have revealed that Millennials give preference to experiences over products⁵. In fact, a majority of consumers from the millennial generation spend money on experience-related purchases. This has driven the experience economy and brands are increasingly focusing on turning ordinary products into experiences.

Being bombarded with advertisements, people have learned the art of avoiding them. We seem to have developed a “built-in ad block”. Immersive storytelling offers something novel, and lets one develop unique stories and environments to attract and engage prospective customers.

Immersive storytelling puts the audience at the centre of the story, giving them a real-life, relatable experience. The feeling of being involved in the story makes it highly engaging for the audience, and this is what makes immersive storytelling more appealing for brands looking to influence and win over new customers. It provides storytellers the chance to take the consumer to any point in time, with the only limitation being imagination. Unique lifelike scenarios can be created, leading to emotive experience. World Wildlife Fund UK has been using this to spread important messages. Immersive storytelling is being adopted by companies worldwide to provide an unparalleled and unforgettable brand experience to their consumers.

6. Conclusion.

Storytelling sells. Storytelling resonates. Storytelling connects.

Storytelling Sells. The way we narrate stories is essential to the varying to the interests of the people and the narratives and the style of the story that at least the way to get into the zone of the advertisement which will be impactful with the story.

Storytelling resonates. Story resonates with the customers and has a brand wagon to it. It stays in your mind as it's something you connect with and resonates as it has a lasting effect on the minds of the public.

Storytelling connects. By storytelling what is essentially happening is that we are creating a bond with the audience. We connect with them emotionally to influence their decisions.

Storytelling is just as important as it's always been, but how we tell stories has evolved. We used to sit around campfires and family tables to share our stories, but today, we often rely on technology to share experiences. And that technology is evolving at a mind-numbing pace. Take amateur photography, for example: we've gone from mail-away film developing, to one-hour photo, to Polaroids, to snapping photos on our phones and immediately sharing them on the social network of our choice. Many cameras even have WiFi capabilities, so we can share or save our memories directly to the cloud.

Brand experiences have also evolved, and so have our expectations about how we experience them. We now expect a brand to have something intellectually and emotionally compelling to offer if it is to gain our attention.

Over the years, we've seen a shift from advertisements that talk at us, to unsolicited direct mail campaigns, to point-of-purchase, to immersive experiences of a brand story. Where once, immersion referred to everything from public relations events to coupons, today, immersion is about the sensory experience itself. Immersion can inspire investment in a story — and, hopefully, in the brand creating the story. Whether an immersive experience is individual, shared, or both, it needs to hit that mark.

Brands today are actively using technology to enhance their relationship with their customers. Therefore, it is important for brands to evolve and stay up-to-date with new technology. Interactive content has already helped brands forge deep, meaningful relationships with their audiences. Hence to conclude we can say that the use of technology based storytelling needs to be developed with main focus as its where the audiences are present and vulnerable. Just like we understand that storytelling is quintessential to positively connect with the brand and form an emotional bond, it's equally important to use the desired media i.e. technology based channels to tell the story as to reach the maximum audience and reach the goals of the company.

⁵ <https://www.business.com/articles/experience-over-goods-the-millennial-shift-in-spending>