



Dogs and their keepers The psychology of brands

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Abstract

As regional director of the World's largest brand evaluation organisation, the Superbrands, I have been engaged to branding for more than 13 years. Our organisation evaluates and awards brands in 90 countries. My region covers four countries in Central Europe: the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria and Switzerland. Countries and companies geographically close to each other, but culturally not necessarily. For more variety, we are dealing with both consumer and business brands, international and local companies, and from family businesses to huge corporations. This wideness of the spectrum makes our job rather difficult, on the other hand it provides me with an endless source of personal experiences. Professional and systematic selection and evaluation on one side, exciting personal observation and cultural anthropology field work on the other side. Now, I would like to share the latter with you.

Having visited thousands of brands/companies I have had the firm impression that people at the company were more or less alike. I have formed a theory stated that people at a brand/company for the longer term will be alike. Having stated this lots of questions arise. Who influences whom? Does the brand have such a strong radiation or the management can determine the behavior of a whole community? Or, is this just an accidental random process? And, what does this have to do with corporate identity?

Obviously, it is all about psychology and organizational anthropology. How the members of an organization, who are in our case mostly in hierarchical order, influence each other and how evolve from this something which we call working spirit or corporate identity.

Psychology as a phenomenon may occur in branding in two different ways. The primal approach examines the brand as a living entity and clothes the brand with human characteristics such as kindness, anger, childishness, trustworthiness, etc. This approach has a plentiful literature and results have been used in marketing practice on a daily basis. Marketers define the identity of their product or service, then find the right characteristics of those and finally build a strategy which fits this entity.

Having been doing this, brand owners need to have human apparatus and personalities (e.g. brand ambassadors) who may represent the brand's values the most towards targeted audience (consumers, partners, stakeholders, etc.). Brand communities and personal branding are relatively new fields of the branding practice. Interaction between person and brand remains always a mysterious question. Who affects whom?

This human aspect opens an other door to exciting psychological and anthropological examinations.

What is employers' branding and how can it support or obstruct the primal objectives of a company? Why do become all members of a corporation alike after a while? Can we consider this process as successful corporate identity building or is it just a natural progression of every human community or is it an accidental random process which has nothing to do with the original intention of the brand owner?

One thing is sure. At most companies, the receptionist, the engineer, the CEO, the shop manager behave and communicate very similarly, in many cases they even look very identical. Just like the most dogs and keepers. Maybe they just spend too much time together...