

New consumers need new brands

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Abstract

Purpose – The value of branding as an effective part of a company's marketing strategy is changing as the needs of the consumer has changed. The purpose of this paper is to identify these changes and to prescribe specific modifications that should be made to the brand and its implementation.

Design/methodology/approach – To better understand the evolving consumer an anthropological approach was employed. A variety of recent studies were considered and it was determined that today's consumer has three prominent needs: knowledge, authenticity, and personal experiences. The paper posits that creating positive experiences, via knowledge and authenticity, represents the next evolutionary phase of brand success.

Findings – Based on this new perspective on branding, the paper offers the following recommendations to brand managers and CMOs: discern the nature of the relationship customers want with the brand; position brand managers as spiritual leaders; speak to the end-user through experiences and metaphors; create a master narrative that reflects the company's core value and is operationalized through the brand; apply the paradox of transparency; build your brand from the inside out, by encouraging employees to be advocates; and examine your current and desired brand personality.

Practical implications – The recommendations and examples of implementation offer the brand manager a roadmap to success. Although these changes would require the support of top management, the benefits are apparent.

Originality/value – It is critical that brand managers both understand and embrace the changes that are occurring within the consumer sector of society. More importantly, these managers must develop strategic and sound principles and practices that respond to these changes. This paper identifies these changes and offers solutions.

Keywords Brands, Brand management, Consumer marketing

Paper type Viewpoint

An executive summary for managers and executive readers can be found at the end of this article.

Branding is something you do to cows. Branding is what you do when there's nothing original about your product (Disney, 2004).

Our whole job is to deceive you into having a good time (Eisner, 2004).

The recent quotes from Roy Disney and Michael Eisner exemplify the challenge faced by modern brands. Essentially, much of our global community is confused by brands rather than enlightened. Part of this confusion comes from the fact that often personalities leading an organization, e.g. Martha Stewart, Dennis Kozlowski, Michael Eisner, have become the brand, and their behavior can either enhance or denigrate the brand. While this connection has always been true, the growth of information technology has moved this process to light speed. If the viability of branding as a business strategy is to survive, the essence of branding must be rethought.

For many companies, brands are expected to make important statements, to signify membership of a social grouping, and/or to express aspects of the user's personality, i.e. Nike reflects individuals who will "Just do it!" The goal is to develop high levels of affinity and identification, as well as giving reassurance about quality and predictable performance. There is growing evidence, however, that as

consumers have grown in sophistication and knowledge, many find these traditional brands too imposing and the identities they offer too homogenized. Still, the value of branding remains evident.

While there is much branding terminology, for example, "emotional branding", "experiential branding", "relationship branding", "brand equity", the real truth of branding is that sales are the single most important measure of any type of branding approach or system. And, when we dig beneath the clever names, well-crafted strategies, and sophisticated measures of brand equity, we come to the conclusion that the focus of branding is a dyad, i. e., the relationship between the brand and the consumer. Or, if we consider the definition of branding found in *Webster's Dictionary*: "To proclaim the qualities of ... in order to sell"; the consumer uses the brand to understand or gauge the qualities of the product, person, or idea. Unfortunately, there is little evidence that companies create the branding strategy through the mind of the consumer. Yes, millions of dollars are spent annually identifying traits and characteristics that consumers assign to a brand. But how do brands enhance the quality of the consumers' life? How do brands solve problems? Answering questions such as these move a company from a focus on brand equity, which is a financial and output measure, to a focus on brand commitment, which is concerned with the benefits the brand brings to the consumer.

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The new consumer

What should companies do? They need to understand the issues the consumer cares about and on which they are vulnerable, and be prepared to act in a vigorous and preemptive manner. There are several forces hitting the American culture at once. September 11 is one force.

Another is the fallibility of our leaders in government and business, a fact you cannot dodge if you consume media. A third force is certainly the large-scale changes in the global economy. A fourth – and never to be underestimated – is the age of the 77 million baby boomers. The median age of that culture-dominant group is around 50. Imagine, one-fourth of our population asking themselves if their earthly existence matters and, if not, what they can do now to change course. It appears that these four trends currently dominate the cultural horizon and speak to the needs of the baby boomers and others.

As abundance in the developed world reduces the need to struggle for basic necessities, the new consumers are freed to devote more time, effort and energy to closing the gap between their real and ideal selves. Their quest for authenticity stems from this relentless striving for self-actualization. Unfortunately, the harder we strive to attain our ideal self the further away it seems to be and the wider the gulf that exists between it and our real self. This leads to feelings of alienation as we increasingly find ourselves separated not only from our ideal self but even from those closest to us. In his 2003 book *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*, Easterbrook (2003, emphasis added) writes:

Ever larger numbers of people enjoy reasonable standards of living, but may feel an inner pang on the question of whether their lives have purpose. Predicting from “material want” is not to say that people will cease caring about material things; it is a prediction that millions will expect both pleasant living standards and a broad sense that their lives have purpose. This is a conundrum, as the sense of meaning is much more difficult to acquire than possessions.

In general, this aspiration for our ideal self has caused many to structure their core world around three key dimensions: knowledge, authenticity, and experiences. Today, many individuals are actively engaged in the pursuit of specialized knowledge about topics such as their health, genealogy, environment, social issues, hobbies, politicians, and products and services, to name but a few. In the case of products and services, knowledge is acquired not just because we want the stuff, but also because we live lives and engage in activities that require stuff in order to function at the highest level within the world. The stuff is secondary to their expertise, and their expertise profoundly influences how and what kind of stuff sells.

Authenticity is a term that is more difficult to define and personalize. *Webster's Ninth* tells us that authentic “implies being fully trustworthy as according with fact or actuality.” Thus, we ask questions such as, “Who can I trust?” or “What can I trust?” or “Am I too trusting?” The concept of trust appears to be vital in our lives. According to Lord Browne, CEO of British Petroleum, the key to maintaining stable relationships – with both shareholders and stockholders – is trust. The 2002 *Trust Barometer (Edelman's Annual Trust Barometer, 2002)* study revealed that ethical behavior is far and away the number one factor in building a record of social responsibility and trust. Nine out of ten respondents in the USA and eight out of ten respondents in Europe said that a corporation's reputation for being trustworthy plays a large role in forming their opinion of the corporation's products and services. Eight out of ten also stated that they are willing to pay more for goods and services from a company with a well-regarded environmental and labor record.

Knowledge and authenticity combine to create our personal experiences. Most experiences are perceptual and emotional, and are different from a rational culture that is objective-trust oriented. Rather than ask: “Is it true?” people operating within the experience paradigm ask: “Is it for real?” Value within the rational paradigm is linked to abstract and cerebral functioning. Value in the experience paradigm is linked to the intensity of the experience – it is visceral, gritty, emotional elements.

There is no single type of common experience. The experience of an experience relies first and foremost on the person's issues. Consequently, any deliberately designed experience should consider how to reach individuals using all five of their senses, combined with an understanding of where they are in respect to emotions, such as belonging, confidence, security, comfort, pleasure, surprise, and community.

These trends are further supported through an assessment of results produced through the Market Facts Panel. This consumer panel contains over 5,000 respondents and includes a variety of lifestyle, behavioral, and demographic items. We have been privy to findings from this panel since the late 1980s and have tracked selected lifestyle items for over 16 years. The 355 lifestyle items are measured on a six-point Likert-like scale ranging from “definitely disagree” to “definitely agree.” Specific items have been considered that load on the four concepts discussed thus far: importance of brands, knowledge, authenticity, and experiences. Statistical tests compared mean scores on these concepts in 1993, 1998, 2002, and 2004. In sum, there was a significant difference between the 1998 v. 2002 mean scores for all four concepts. The same is true when comparing 2002 with 2004 mean scores. All four concepts are growing in importance.

It is our contention that creating positive experiences, via knowledge and authenticity, represents the next evolutionary phase of the world economy and marketing success. Then it stands to reason that those who control access to the most authentic experiences will be best positioned to command a strong branding strategy. In such a world, economic power and profits will not likely emanate from economies of scale, production proficiency, or elaborate advertising campaigns. Brand success will be based on developing meaningful connections with individual consumers. Each consumer is on a personal quest for a better life. Experiences, knowledge, authenticity – that is what matters.

The new brand

The brand epiphany in all of this comes with recognizing that we need to understand consumers in flux, consumers that aspire to a different lifestyle, based on aspirations and meaningful personal experiences. Relevant brands will help consumers make that journey and will allow consumers to move toward a destination they feel good about, regarding both its pragmatic, utilitarian value and its emotional attachment. This will happen so long as the brand invites consumers to participate on their own terms, not as an icon to another “better world”, but because they are concerned about their own world. The dimensions of consumption we talk about are those that have a direct impact on an individual's life. These are the key ideas needed to support any branding strategy.

Marketers, rather than exhibiting empathy for the plight of the confused consumer, have assumed that employing an aggressive brand strategy is the most effective approach to motivate consumers to move away from the familiar, i.e. to take risk. It acknowledges the fact that products are quickly becoming commodities, with very little lead-time, and that the brand is the best alternative for their success. Brand is now viewed as the traditional “sizzle”. Moreover, most of the brand strategies have moved away from the core brand and employ a variety of periphery benefits. Examples include quality service, relationship marketing, permission marketing, cause marketing, and so forth.

We believe that brands are still vital, but they win competitive battles not because they deliver distinctive benefits, excellent service, or innovative technologies. Rather, they succeed because they forge a deep connection with the individual. In essence, they compete for individual share. And, the strategic focus should be on what the brand stands for, not how the brand performs. We offer the following suggestions as a means for connecting the new consumer with the new brand. We posit that the new role of brands is about individual identity, in which consumers want to participate actively in the meanings brands provide. This is more about pride, discovery, creation, confidence, caring, and excitement, which are now the domain of brands that provide individualistic alternatives. These interactions activate feelings and build strong brand commitment. Values driving these brands include reconnection with personal roots (including family) and in-your-face authenticity that seeks to deny marketing constrictions.

We offer the following suggestions to remake brands that respond to new consumers:

- 1 *Discern the nature of the relationship customers want with the brand.* Surprisingly, recent research indicates that over 40 percent of customers neither need nor desire a relationship with a brand, while 35 percent need a solid relationship with a brand. Moreover, customers expect more from brands they have strong relationships with – they expect relationship-worthy brands to do two things: meet their needs better than others, and treat them in a way that demonstrates they know and value them as customers. Yet, the strongest affirmation of a brand relationship is when customers are willing to invest time, energy, money, and other resources into the brand beyond those expended during purchase or consumption. Harley Davidson is an example. The Harley Davidson Motor Co. has cracked the code that separates weak from strong brands. No other brand has the degree of unshakable loyalty and advocacy that its customers ascribe to it. Harleys are synonymous with the world’s most recognizable motorcycles and deeply connected to American culture and values. They have become symbols of rugged individualism, freedom and rebellion. But how did Harley-Davidson do it? It did not happen overnight. Harley cultivated its image and relationships over a long period of time (over 100 years) and effectively wrapped itself around its customers using multiple marketing techniques. Every touch point – the product itself, its distribution channels, sales, customer service, design, communications, brand extensions, etc. were harnessed to enhance relationships. What Harley-Davidson clearly understands is that the people who buy Harleys want

to be part of an extended family – a community of free-spirited adventure seekers. For example, the Harley Owners Group (HOG) comprises 650,000 members worldwide and provides an organized way for Harley riders to share their passion and show their pride. In 2003, more than 250,000 people from around the world descended on Milwaukee to celebrate the 100th anniversary. How many customers would attend a celebration of any of your brands?

- 2 *Position brand managers as spiritual leaders, who inspire the faithful to celebrate the core values and spirit the business symbolizes by its corporate brands.* Although the metaphor of the brand manager as priest may be shocking, it has a longstanding place in organization theory. Amitai Etzioni once contrasted three forms of commitment: coercive commitment generated by totalizing institutions such as prisons; calculative commitment generated by economic institutions such as businesses; and the personal identification elicited by ideological motivations like religions. To the extent that commitments to corporate brands require personal identification on the part of stakeholders, studying the role of faith in business makes perfect sense. This is illustrated in a current example through a business best seller, *The CEO and the Monk* (Catell *et al.*, 2004). This book describes the unlikely partnership of a savvy CEO and a former monk who led their company to the top even when embracing a higher set of business standards. It examines KeySpan’s success from the perspective of Robert Catell and Kenny Moore, who have adopted the values of the community it serves and exposing a management philosophy that brought caring and a sense of soul into the workplace. As an aside, Moore has surveyed over 500 CEOs and reports that nearly 80 percent indicate that their business decision are strongly influenced by their relationship with a personal deity.
- 3 *Speak to the end-user through experiences and metaphors.* Companies need to create an experience that deepens the bond with their end-users. To persuade female college students to try ob Tampons, Johnson & Johnson created a unique way to manage stress and inspire confidence. The company set up interactive stations on campuses operating kickboxing instructions and juice bars. Charismatic, confident female students volunteered as the brand’s student ambassadors to spread the word to their classmates. In addition, the butterfly was employed as a metaphor for the freedom users would experience. We in the Rocky Mountain Region are very fortunate to have access to one of the finest book stores in the world. The Tattered Cover Book Store, owned by Joyce Miskis, is an independent brand known to residents and visitors. Customers can cite hundreds of stories of unbelievable service provided by a staff of 200 booklovers, most working for \$6.00/hour. Extensive searches are made based on the most obscure clues, i.e. the book about apples = *Cider House Rules*, with no complaints or hesitancy. The Tattered Cover is known for its extraordinary customer service. Meskis has a database of more than 108,000 customers worldwide. The setting encourages browsing. There are overstuffed chairs and lamps, wooden bookshelves, and hunter green carpets. What we are trying to do, notes Meskis, “... is to put people and ideas together in a

comfortable, nonthreatening environment that encourages them to expand their horizons.”

- 4 *Create a master narrative that reflects the company’s core values and is operationalized through the brand.* This narrative clearly articulates the company’s ideals, extending through all internal operations and external operations. In a recent *HBR* article, Stephen Denning articulates the problems and benefits in creating company narrative:

... most executives operate with a particular-and generally justified mind-set. Analysis is what drives business thinking. It cuts through the fog of myth, gossip, and speculation to get to the hard facts... yet this strength is also a weakness. Analysis might excite the mind, but it hardly offers a route to the heart. And that is what where we must go if we are to motivate people not only to take action but do so with energy and enthusiasm.

He posits that effective storytelling will do this in certain situations where nothing else works (Denning, 2004, p. 123). We suggest that the corporate mission statement and/or value statement would serve as an initial reference. Although both tend to be somewhat esoteric, they should reflect the corporate ideal and bring certain story elements to mind, such as courage, harmony, sacrifice, caring, equity, compassion, and so forth. No brand better illustrates such a narrative than Ben & Jerry’s. This narrative is based on the company’s value statement:

We have a progressive, nonpartisan social mission that seeks to meet the human needs and illuminate injustices in our local, national, and international communities by integrating these concerns into our day-to-day business activities. Our focus is on children and families, the environment and sustainable agriculture on family farms.

With Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield as the brand’s primary ambassadors, millions of consumers have become aware of the hundreds of events and initiatives that are a part of Ben & Jerry’s. Examples include, the creation of “the world’s largest ice cream sundae” (27,102 lbs); establishment of the Ben & Jerry’s Foundation, which awards 7.5 percent of sales to charity; the introduction of Cherry Garcia® ice cream; awarded the Corporate Giving Award from the Council on Economic Development; named the US Small Business Persons of the year by President Bush; Rescues Rhode Island’s legendary Newport Folk Festival; prints a “Support Farm Aid” panel on 8 million print cups; begin a two-pronged national search for a new CEO, by holding a “I’m your CEO!” contest inviting 100-word applications; winning the NYU’s Stern School of Business no. 1 rank in the “Social Responsibility” category, and; partnering with the Dave Matthews Band to create the SaveOurEnvironment.org web site to fight global warming. Perhaps most profound is its creation of KaBoom!® in 1999. KaBoom! Is the national non-profit organization that has united individuals, community groups, donors and businesses into building nearly 500 much-needed, safe and fun community play places. It has more than 80,000 volunteers. All of this reflects the narrative of fun, caring and socially responsibility, shared by two inspiring men and thousands of like-minded employees and supporters.

- 5 *Apply the paradox of transparency.* A fundamental rule of business has been to keep major developments in secret

so that competitors will not be able to respond. This policy must now adapt to the new rules of the game in which transparency becomes the first obligation. In 2001 the Shell public affairs department coined the term “paradox of transparency”. This approach reflects the new rules of the marketplace. Companies will be perceived more favorably if they divulge news, good or bad, as promptly and completely as possible and disclose steps they are taking to respond to the challenge. The smart company understands that consumers and employees do not demand perfection. A company now finds strength in telling its consumers what it knows – and what it does not – through ongoing dialogue and continued discussion of risks. Companies should build a culture of accountability and responsibility by integrating both into their daily business operations respect for labor rights, human rights, protection of the environment, and other core values of corporate citizenship. Trust will be sustained through accurate reporting of the bottom line, as well as the so-called “triple bottom line”, that includes measures of social and environmental impact. Few brands are more transparent than Starbucks. One of the world’s largest franchise operations with nearly 8,000 retail locations and 25 million customers each week, Starbucks is as transparent as its chairman, Howard Schultz. Schultz, who purchased the business from the original founders in 1987, exhibits his commitment to his stockholders and his social conscience every chance he gets. To quote Schultz:

Starbucks business practices are even more relevant today as consumers take a cultural audit of the goods and services they use. Starbucks is known not only for serving the highest quality coffee, but for enriching the daily lives of its people, customers, and coffee farmers.

- 6 *Build your reputation from the inside out, by encouraging employees to be advocates.* A brand’s value proposition starts with employees who are inspired by the CEO. Employees would rather work for companies with strong values and are more likely to communicate these values to others. Research shows that opinion leaders in the USA are more than twice as likely to believe information conveyed by “regular employees” than by CEOs or CFOs. Great brands today, such as Southwest Airlines, rely on strong employee loyalty to power the firm’s reputation and brands from the inside out. They engage their employees in all deliberations related to the brand’s value portfolio; especially when major changes are suggested. Pay a visit to Southwest’s Headquarters just off Love Field in Dallas, and you will probably think you’ve wandered on the set of Pee-Wee’s Playhouse. The walls are festooned with the more than 10,000 picture frames, containing photos of employee’s pets, of Herb-Kelleher dressed like Elvis or in drag, of stewardesses in mini-skirts, of Southwest planes gnawing on competitors aircrafts. Then there are teddy bears, and jars of pickled hot peppers and pink flamingos. Finally, following 9/11, while the rest of the industry laid off thousands of people, Southwest did not furlough a single employee and has remained in the black every quarter.
- 7 *Examine your current and desired brand personality.* Although brand personality is often related to more descriptive usage imagery, it should involve more

contextual information. Jennifer Aaker identifies five dimensions of brand personality:

- sincerity (e.g., down to earth, honest, wholesome, security, cheerful);
- excitement (e.g., daring, spirited, fun, imaginative, up-to-date);
- competence (e.g., reliable, intelligent, successful);
- sophistication (e.g., upper-class, charming, special approval); and
- ruggedness (e.g., outgoing, tough).

Rather than begin with identifying the brand personality, it might be wiser to assess the personality of the organization. Although one might assume that an organization cannot have a personality, Sandra Feteke would disagree. Her company, i.e. Feteke + Co., has designed a personality test based on the Meyers-Briggs test, which draws on psychoanalyst Carl Jung's theories that there are common behavioral patterns in the way that people perceive and process information. It determines individuals' personality traits based on their preferences among the mental processes. Feteke believes that by having everyone in the organization take her test, CEOs can better understand their company's character, play up its strengths, shore up its weaknesses, and improve the firm's focus on its core values. In 80 percent of the cases thus far, the perception of the CEO significantly differs from the perception of the staff. Creating the best corporate personality is likely correlated with the brand produced.

Conclusions

One thing is very clear. The events of the last decade have made brand names a "trustmark" as never before. In uncertain times, the desire for the "new" gives way to a yearning for the known and the trusted. The consumer needs to be able to rely on the fact that some things do not change. Ultimately, these same brand characteristics should permeate the entire organization.

There is a tremendous opportunity for businesses to stand out and demonstrate that they have a strong commitment to people. We posit that reputation and character will be what matter most, and that the ability to give your brand a personal connection with customers will be a measure of success in the future. Ultimately, a brand willing to make this commitment also becomes a key tool for gauging customer circumstances so that the company can recalibrate its approach in order to remain relevant. That is, company management must understand the customer's emotional and social "context" for making decisions. During economic slowdowns, customers may scrutinize more and differently, allowing fear and uncertainty to seep into their psyches. But they still make purchases, and they continue responding to brands they consider relevant, whose core value propositions resonate and which are flexible enough to accommodate any changes or disturbances to their mental state and their personal values.

It is sad and somewhat ironic that the brand first mentioned in this article, i.e. Disney, represented many of these characteristics 50 years ago. Walt Disney was clearly the spiritual leader, educating us on Sunday evenings with the Wonderful World of Disney, and every weekday with the Mickey Mouse Club, as well as movies about historical figures, outer space, and adventure. He was authentic, as were

the many characters at Disneyland, Disneyworld, and shows via television and movies. All these elements together represented experiences that were profound to his primary target market – children – and their parents, who felt a certain relief that Disney was able to do magical things to make their children happier. There may be many parallels between the consumers of the 1950s and 1960s. For many Baby Boomers we wish for those simpler times. Times when we could trust more, when we knew our neighbor, when we did not have to answer hundreds of e-mails and phone messages, and when we believed that Annette or Cubby could be our girlfriend or boyfriend.

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Executive summary and implications for managers and executives

This summary has been provided to allow managers and executives a rapid appreciation of the content of the article. Those with a particular interest in the topic covered may then read the article in toto to take advantage of the more comprehensive description of the research undertaken and its results to get the full benefit of the material present.

Changing times, changing brands? Really understanding customers remains the key

Aficionados of Dale Carnegie's classic text *How to Win Friends and Influence People* may sign up to idiom *plus ça change, plus ça même chose*. As we change we also remain the same. The emotions that drive people – their need to succeed, their fear of failure, their need to be seen to succeed and not fail – these things seem to remain constant. Any young managers out testing Carnegie's golden rules for the first time are often shocked to learn how basically similar they are to their grandparents and great grandparents.

Against such a context, claims for change can seem greatly exaggerated. In a world of 24-hour news and instant analysis by “experts” of dubious pedigree, sensationalism rules and basic, underlying truths of human behavior get lost in the noise. They are simply too unexciting to report.

A new mood, or an older one?

It is against this background that new claims need to be judged. Changes are a-foot, and research by John Burnett and R. Bruce Hutton of the University of Denver succinctly grasps the mood. They set out to explore changes in marketing and branding strategy required to meet the current changes in consumer needs. People are people, but to some extent the times they are a-changing. In developed markets basic needs are more than met, in fact obesity levels indicate lands of plenty. Whole industries have emerged analyzing the changes in behavior associated with demographics and socio-economic trends.

From Burnett and Hutton's work the advice is to:

- discern the nature of the relationship customers want with the brand;
- position brand managers as spiritual leaders;
- speak to the end-user through experiences and metaphors;
- create a master narrative that reflects the company's core value and is operationalized through the brand;
- apply the paradox of transparency;
- build your brand from the inside out, by encouraging employees to be advocates; and
- examine your current and desired brand personality.

What their work reveals is that what was once considered new age has moved into the mainstream. The paradox is that spirituality goes back to the origins of mankind. Storytelling

too seems to have existed since the origins of speech. The oral traditions of storytelling underpin the histories of all civilizations. They are bound together by myths and legends. Managers like to use metaphors; it taps into a more ancient story telling tradition. A “master narrative” simply extends the process.

Rather than entering a new age, brand managers have to come to terms with the spirit of mankind. It may have been lost in the constraints of the rational, logical world that was artificially created. Older truths seem to have returned.

The focus on values is a helpful one. The essence of the research highlights the need to build brands that people can relate to – employees because they are proud of their brand, customers because the brand matters to them.

Employees have always talked boldly about their company and their products if they are proud of them, just as craftsmen used to take pride in their bespoke work. Mass production and the machine age may have dehumanized things, but the whole person is back in a post-industrial age.

Transparency has been the key to honest practice since early times. People are vulnerable to temptation; religions are based upon this. The popular ethics rule of thumb that asks a person to consider whether they would be happy to see their actions broadcast on the nine o'clock news applies. Transparency promotes honesty, promotes integrity, and brand integrity is everyone's obsession, or should be.

Brand managers as spiritual leaders may seem more of a stretch. It should not do. Marketers have long since realized that they are appealing to the emotions more than logic within consumers. For every car bought on the back of its fuel consumption, many more are bought for what they say about the purchaser.

Returning to arguments from corporate ethics some will view such a development as a natural extension of the broader views of corporate social responsibility that currently prevail. Others will be alarmed by the rise of self-interested pseudo-prophets. The arguments for a narrower view in which business concentrates merely on business are equally strong – from Adam Smith to Milton Friedman.

What Burnett and Hutton have pulled together is that in order to maximize profits for shareholders, the narrow view of corporate social responsibility, businesses need to base their positions on the arguments of the broader view. A case is made in which doing the right thing is indistinguishable from doing well. It is a powerful argument, and a practical one.

Maybe consumers are changing, but maybe companies and researchers are actually opening their eyes to some deep-seated realities about how people are. Of course, when times are lean it is dog eat dog. But there is fundamental decency too, and for most that feels a lot more satisfying.

(A précis of the article “New consumers need new brands”. Supplied by Marketing Consultants for Emerald.)

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