

Emotional Branding: A Relationship to Linguistic Context and Terms

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Abstract

This essay will be an examination of emotional branding by looking at a case study of an emotional marketing campaign, looking at it in relationship with several lexicon terms relating to marketing concepts, a list of which was developed over the past term. The case study will be of Save the Children's "Most Shocking Second a Day" video and will examine the terms audience, strategic planning, C.R.A.P., graphic standards and intangibles. A section of this document will look at each lexicon term on its own, relating it to the campaign, then a final summary will attempt to show the interconnected relationships between terms.

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Emotional Branding

There is an often-repeated notion that although most people like to believe that they make purchase decisions rationally, most purchase decisions actually have emotional decision making a central element (Margalit, 2015). Therefore, it is important for marketers in the arts and other professions to be aware of this and consider emotional branding, or branding that seeks to leverage appeals to emotion as viable marketing a strategy.

Case Study.

Save the Children is a top-rated charity based out of the United Kingdom that started in 1919 and dedicates itself to promoting the rights of children in developing and war torn countries. Nearly 100 years after their founding, in 2014, the organization began a new marketing campaign intended to raise awareness about the effects of war and civil strife on children in Syria using the popular ‘second a day’ video blogging format (Save The Children, 2014). In the ad, we see a collection of one second long videos of a young girl supposedly taken over the course of one year starting on her ninth and ending tenth birthday. The video opens with the subject smiling, happy, and surrounded by family and friends as she ponders the nine candles glowing on her birthday cake. The following year, her middle-class London lifestyle slowly begins to deteriorate, at first without her noticing the news or discussions happening in the background, then rapidly descending into chaos as civil strife and the harsh brutalities of war begin to encroach. In the final single second clip, we see the girl gazing blankly as she sits shell shocked pondering the single candle on the cake as her mother sings “happy birthday” in a

broken voice. The video is heart wrenching and calls upon the viewer to experience the horrible effects of war on innocent children and their families. This emotional appeal is powerful, demanding that the viewer remember the plight of refugee children in war torn countries while offering avenues for the viewer to take action by suggesting a \$5 donation. As of this writing, the video has garnered 56,103,862 views on YouTube. The stunning emotional appeal of this video has contributed significantly to its success in spreading awareness of their cause.

Lexicon Terms

Audience.

In marketing, audience refers to the population of people the marketing campaign intends to sway. In the above case study, the audience Save the Children intends to target is broad swaths of people, primarily in (but not limited to) English speaking countries as these areas are currently less affected by civil war than Syria and generally have disposable income to donate. The director of the video, Martin Stirling, is quoted as saying “We wanted to make something which would resonate on a global stage which felt contemporary and relevant to modern audiences.” (UNIT9, n.d.) This appeal to a global audience is appropriate in this case because the Syrian refugee crisis is an issue taking place on the world stage affecting millions of people and requires a large scale, global response to even be marginally effective. That said, not all organizations need such a broad far reaching approach. In fact, in many cases, it can be counterproductive to reach for an audience that large.

Modern advances in web-based marketing make it very possible for organizations to either reach a very broad audience or to target a very narrow one. Recent changes in fee structures for online marketplaces like Facebook make it much more desirable for firms to target marketing efforts very specifically by ensuring that they are only putting their marketing efforts

in front of people likely to be swayed by their campaign. It often makes sense to break audiences down into quite narrow target markets, directing limited resources specifically to these specific audiences, narrowing down by available criteria such as geographic area, interests, hobbies or even political values which allows marketers to craft campaigns that align very closely with the intended audience. Using these techniques to be very specific about audience selection make that much easier for an organization to put great content in front of the right audience which, as Seth Reoval describes, is an effective recipe for great success (Reoval, 2017).

Strategic Planning.

Strategic planning is a systematic method by which organizations can identify goals, set a course, evaluate progress and make tactical adjustments as they strive to achieve specific outcomes. In the case of the Save the Children, the goal referred to above was to craft a powerful, yet broad emotional message that would resonate with modern audiences around the world raising awareness of the plight of children in Syria. The production used this notion as a guiding principal and, as Sterling states, it “directly fed into our creative treatment which became framed by the ‘one second a day’ device”. This strategic approach led to a very clear, unified artistic vision and kept the entire production team working together with a laser like focus. The entire shoot consisted of sixty separate scenes shot over the course of just two days. The fact that the crew accomplished so much work in such a short time stands as testament to the carefully planned, goal oriented approach of the production team. The decision to re-imagine the declining societal situation to an otherwise reasonably stable western country like the UK proved to be an effective strategic decision that brought the emotional impact and reality of war uncomfortably close to western audiences greatly increasing the emotional resonance with them as an audience.

This goal oriented approach extended beyond the film's creating process and contributed to the successful distribution and viral spread as well. The video's title, "Most Shocking Second a Day" is an example of a now well-known click-bait technique that creates a phenomenon called a "curiosity gap" that compels potential viewers to click on the video by withholding information while piquing their curiosity. This technique is now ubiquitous as deploying it greatly increases the likelihood that a browsing person will click on the link to satisfy their curiosity. This clickbait tactic, combined with the powerful emotional payoff led people to share the video both personally and on a multitude of online forums, leading it to quickly go viral. In the first week after its release, the video had already garnered more than 21 million views worldwide.

C.R.A.P.

When developing a marketing campaign, it is important to consider the impact that design will have on the transmission of the intended message. The basic elements of design are defined as Contrast, Repetition, Alignment and Proximity, with each element bringing its own strength and contribution (Williams, 2004). The designer must place these elements in a relationship to and balance with one another to compose an effective design.

Save the Children's design, features a stark contrast between the peace, joy and hope promised in the opening scene and the fear, anxiety and hopelessness shown at the end. The viewer experiences Repetition when the video both opens and closes with the image of a birthday cake and the song "happy birthday". This repetition and callback to the beginning is especially powerful given the stark contrast of the ending to the beginning.



Figure 1: The opening scene of the video Most Shocking Second a Day



Figure 2: The closing scene of the video Most Shocking Second a Day

The video features Alignment in its design by the consistent and unwavering centering of the little girl in the frame throughout the entire 90 second video. This places a very strong emphasis on the humanity of the girl throughout her steady decline from hope to despair. Finally, proximity in design refers to the spatial relationship between elements in the composition. In this case, as the video takes place over time, the primary spatial relationship is the time each video clip stitching the video together spends on the screen. By having virtually every scene on the screen merely one second, the director establishes a very steady, driving, and eventually relentless rhythm that just adds to the strength of the composition.

The solid application of C.R.A.P. principles in this piece work together to ensure that this design is not only balanced and composed, but also stirring and emotionally powerful.

Graphic Standards.

Graphic standards are the formal rules established by an organization that dictate how visual elements of the brand can be shared. Maintaining a strict set of graphic standards is important for firms of all types because it is very easy for messaging and identity to get lost or cluttered in the miasma of wide ranging stylistic opportunities available when assembling C.R.A.P. in marketing designs. Therefore, to ensure that design elements do not stray from established norms, leaders must formalize the graphic elements of design into a standard vocabulary that very strictly controls how marketers (and others) can use visual and design elements to represent the company.

In the case of the Most Shocking Second a Day campaign, the video establishes a clear and consistent if stark visual language throughout the video. After the video ends, in lieu of end credits we are left with an unadorned, white page with a hashtag by which followers can engage further with the brand. “#SAVESYRIASCHILDREN” and the official logo for the organization.

The logo is a simple, red on white stylized graphic of a child holding their arms up in a “V” while enclosed in a slightly open circle. Following the hashtag leads to the organization’s web site where the graphic stark, red on white composition style continues through from the video. Further, the site features several photographs of disadvantaged children encircled by the slightly open circle which serves to bring their logo to life. These strong visual elements remain consistent throughout all the evident collateral from Save the Children. This strength of design and consistency imbue the materials with a gravitas and weight that lend a sense of urgency and a sense of legitimacy to the materials that support the communication, leaving the reader feeling secure in the belief that this is a reputable company that really cares and can be an effective partner in helping children in need.

Intangibles.

Intangibles relate to the non-material benefits offered by an organization. In the case of Save the Children, the marketing campaign is designed to accomplish several things. Primarily, the campaign appears to be intended to appeal to the viewer’s emotions and humanize those struggling as refugees in war torn parts of the world. Second, the campaign is designed to mobilize this emotional response, gently asking the viewer to donate money to their cause. By donating money to disadvantaged children in war torn regions across the world, the donor will not receive a tangible reward in return. Instead, the tangible benefit will (mostly) go to a disadvantaged child. The benefit received by the donor will be almost completely intangible. In this circumstance, the donor is purchasing the feeling of satisfaction and well-being produced by knowing that their contribution made the difference in the life of a child.

Conclusions

Emotional branding can be a powerful marketing tool. Statistical analysis comparing and contrasting emotional branding to other marketing strategies such as experiential marketing and brand trust based strategies observed a statistically “significant contribution between Emotional Branding towards Brand Loyalty” while experiential marketing and brand trust based strategies did not (Dewanti, Chu, & Wibisono, 2011). Emotional marketing strategies can be a powerful choice to motivate

Having a clear understanding of the intended audience is key as that will help an organization focus their message, allowing marketers to use available resources as wisely as possible. Understanding who the intended audience is, is an essential aspect of strategic planning. Strategic planning is important because it is the process by which organizations identify communication goals and set plans to achieve them. With a strategic plan in place, it is time to design the message. In working with the fundamentals of Contrast, Repetition, Alignment and Proximity a marketer can balance these elements in a strategic fashion to form a unified design that effectively communicates the intended message to the intended audience. Once an appropriate design is decided upon, it will be important to either check to ensure the design fits within established graphic standards, or work to establish a rigorous set of graphic standards. This will ensure that future off-brand graphic design experiments don't accidentally distort carefully chosen messages. Finally, when employing an emotional marketing strategy, it is important to remember that emotions are powerful things. As has been mentioned before, consumers do not generally make rational purchasing decisions. Instead, people largely make decisions using their emotions. Therefore, it is imperative that we not underestimate the intangible aspects of marketing and branding. In fact, in many cases, when the cause is worthy,

as it often is for charitable causes or the arts, the product purchased by a consumer is itself very often intangible.

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