

How Warm Advertisements Stimulate Consumption

All brands take advantage of advertisement to build their own distinct image and attract specific customers. The E-life Mall Corporation, a local electronics and appliances retailer founded in 1975, is especially well-known for its advertisements that emphasize community life and heart-felt services.

E-life Mall Corporation has made quite a few touching advertisements. The general theme is all about “family” and the setting is clearly the rural parts of southern Taiwan, with characters that usually include lower class parents and children or even three generations. The plots show the interaction between family members as poor parents dream about buying an air-conditioner so that their children could study in comfort, or grown-up children working in the city buying electronic appliances for their parents to make their life in the countryside more comfortable and convenient. Then at the end of the clips, E-life Mall Corporation would emerge to make such dreams possible by offering the customers installment plans with zero-percent interest. These advertisements give people in the lower class the conception that they could express their love for their parents through material goods, just like the middle class people. It is usually hard for the poor to imagine that they could afford costly appliances; however, the advertisements give them the confidence that they are not that poor and have the ability to make their living environment better while materializing the definition of love. The warm commercial easily persuades the audience that one easy way to convey love is to buy something for their loved ones at such economically difficult times. In the warmth of the story, the audience forgets to reflect why the economy is getting worse or why they remain poor. As they dream in the comfort zone, they lose their critical thinking.

Advertisements not only bring us a brand’s unique images, but also influence our value judgments on the issues mentioned in the advertisements. In that sense, the most heart-warming commercials are also the ones that need a good analysis.

The Oblivious Consumers

A few days ago, my mother asked me to go with her to the mall to shop for the stuff that she is going to take with her on her Japan-tour. At the bath section, she grabbed five bath towels without hesitation. I was pretty surprised because for such a woman who demands the best quality in everything all the time, my mother, however, chose the towels with a price that reflects their poor quality. Then I saw the “buy one, get one free” sign, and I finally understood why my mother exhibited such an irrational behavior.

Manufacturers often use free gifts or big discounts to attract the customers, but more often than not, these products will be of a lower quality. In my mother’s case, the towels she got for free were handkerchief-size towels which are not worth much money. She later complained to me a lot about the poor quality of those bath towels, as well as these bonus towels. But when I asked her, “Will you make the same decision if there is the same discount for promotion?” she was silent for a moment and replied, “of course.” Obviously, the same promotion tricks will always work because customers just cannot seem to remember the lessons learned.

Besides the attraction of cheap bonus gifts provided by the retailers, our media also play a crucial part in cultivating consumer forgetfulness. For instance, the media usually only concentrate on red-hot news and stay on them only for a short time. Media companies generally aim to attract the audiences, therefore, news which are worthy of public attention are often neglected on purpose, while sensational news spring up like mushrooms. However, the “mushrooms” do not live long, as new sprouts come up all the time, leaving no room to track worthwhile topics. Gradually, the audience lost track of issues as the new washes away former news.

As the oblivious mindset spreads, people no longer remember the hazards related to some famous brands. The issue of the famous pearl milk tea contaminated by melamine and toxic starch was a huge hit in the news a few years ago, but in a matter of two months it was all forgotten. The beverage shops posted announcements claiming that the ingredients are all reliable and even offered discounts as well, especially for pearl milk tea at that time. Soon after, beverage shops were swarmed with customers as usual. It may seem like this world is hopeless in that problems are left behind easily, but at least we can still count on an increasing number of enterprises, such as MUJI, STARBUCKS and *eslite*, that are willing to offer goods which are guaranteed to be trustworthy.

Sony: PlayStation 4 “A Possibility of Share”

The PlayStation 4 (PS4) is a home video game console developed by Sony Computer Entertainment and came into vogue as soon as the company put it on the market. Customers may buy PS4 to play video games for relieving stress, for entertainment, or just for its design and performance. However, a commercial about PS4 in 2014 reveals that Sony wants to bring more experiences for its customers.

This commercial showed a fictitious character Tamachi, who became an expert player and a famous youtuber at the same time. Before discovering her talent and becoming celebrated, she was merely a fresh graduate who worried about employment problems. After she failed to apply for a post, her elder brother invited her to play video games together via the share button on his PS4 in order to comfort her. To his surprise, Tamachi showed an astonishing flair for playing a FPS (first-person shooter). She finally found her confidence and took advantage of her great skills to help other people; meanwhile, she started to upload her own videos and obtained a lot of admiration. In the end, she decided to teach others how to play the video game well.

I think this commercial does much more than telling an inspirational and fantasy story; in fact, there are two unique things about the story. First, the story makes good use of the affection between family members to create new meanings for the video game. In the commercial, the elder brother is often concerned about his sister, which demonstrates an ideal relationship between family members that appeals to ordinary people. Sony connects the product with family affection through this plot and proves that with the share function on the new PS4, playing video games is not an individual diversion only, but a way to share emotions and interlink a single person with the whole world. In the end, Tamachi turns down all job offers and determines to concentrate her attention on initiating her own course in a video game. In that sense, games are not just a form of recreation for her, but a stage on which she can unroll her genius and aspiration. This commercial then illustrates the possibility of creating one's own future through video games that are often considered to be a waste of time.

Second, the commercial chooses to feature a female player, which is an indication that Sony wants to break through the traditional gender stereotype so as to attract more female players/customers. Interestingly, the focus may be on Tamachi, yet she is surrounded by more SONY products throughout the film. In fact, product placement is so cleverly done that there is no need for any slogan or propaganda and the viewers are exposed to the products all the time. We can see that the brand of smartphone which Tamachi uses is Sony Ericsson. As for her brother, his smartphone is Sony's Xperia Z. Moreover, even the television in the commercial is a product of Sony. In that sense, the plot and the setting provide additional opportunities to promote these products. It is smart that Sony does not need to spend more money to increase its brand awareness.

This commercial wisely uses strategies to enhance our preference for the SONY brand and its video game console. A touching story and concepts of gender equality further make the story, as well as the brand, favorable. It may seem that these advertisements aim to advance social progress, but do not forget that no matter how meaningful these commercials are, their main purpose is to entice people into spending money to buy the product.

The Truth Behind the “One for One” System

Opening the official website of TOMS shoes, what do you expect to see after you click the button? New arrivals? Sale items? In fact, none of the above are right---instead, you will see a picture of four African children, wearing TOMS shoes. In addition to this, a slogan comes into view---“One for One.” This slogan is the primary reason why TOMS shoes have made such a great success in business.

This “One for One” idea came from Blake Mycoskie, the founder of the TOMS Shoes Company. In 2006, Mycoskie participated in a reality TV show “The Amazing Race,” which asked him to take a journey to Argentina. In Argentina, he saw some children living in the slums just outside the bustling capital, and they had no shoes to wear. For the first time, Mycoskie saw the real effect of being shoeless---the blisters, the sores, and the Chigoe flea, which may lead to limb amputation. As a result, Mycoskie established the TOMS Shoes Company and started to proceed with this “One for One” project--- buy a pair of shoes and TOMS will donate another pair to people in need.

Surprisingly, the founding idea, a buy-one-give-one promise, totally captures the hearts of consumers. TOMS Shoes has built a brand on the promise of giving shoes to underprivileged children in developing countries. But here is an interesting question: Why are consumers attracted by this idea? Do consumers purchase the shoes because they want to appear to be charitable by doing some good deeds? In reality, the “One for One” business model can cleverly satisfy two cravings of consumers simultaneously---first, the desire to feel themselves as members of the dominant group in a hierarchy---look, I am such a kind-hearted person that I always think of the poor even when I am shopping. Second, to appease a sense of guilt that they feel while spending money, which is also called the “Buyer’s remorse”---if I share the wealth with the poor, it may be less guilty to purchase.

Besides, it has also been pointed out that this “One for One” system may cause some terrible impact on developing countries’ shoes industry. On the one hand, if TOMS Shoes Company keep donating shoes to developing countries’ children, for example, then people in Africa will no longer buy shoes made by the local shoes factory---which means TOMS’ act of kindness actually does harm to the local shoes market, and the local shoes industry will go out of business, causing more unemployment. Further, this “One for One” campaign totally misses the fundamental point that not having a pair of shoes is not merely a problem about shoes. It’s a problem of poverty. Donating shoes won’t improve poverty, but job opportunities do help. For example, if TOMS set up its shoes factory in Africa, the company could help the poor by providing jobs opportunities.

Before buying the TOMS shoes, maybe we should just take a few minutes to consider the real reason why we spend our money on it. What is your motive to buy the shoes? Besides, we should remember that there are some controversies over the “One for One” system’s influence, and we should not consider the deed as completely good.

Pinkoi Your Daily Life

Nowadays, people are looking more and more similar to another as everybody wears the same T-shirts, the same shoes, and the same jeans. Fortunately, we now have Pinkoi to make you look unique. Pinkoi was established in Taiwan as Asia's online marketplace for buying and selling original design products. It offers independent artists a place to present their own stories and creations, and gives consumers a platform to find something that corresponds to their own aesthetics of living. Compared with other online platforms, Pinkoi focuses on design, quality, and uniqueness rather than low price and volume discounts.

To begin with, Pinkoi is very careful in showing the picture for the merchandise. It is always presented with a theme and stories to make the commodities sold on Pinkoi website stand out. While photos on other websites may be flat and monotonous, Pinkoi photos use background colors that highlight the merchandise. Furthermore, Pinkoi always reveals the designers' own ideas and special production stories of the commodities for their consumers who will not merely see the final goods, but also understand the background of the commodity by browsing through the text written in every product page. In the end, they are so affected by the production concept that they feel themselves related to the stories and must buy the product.

In addition to the online shopping platform, Pinkoi has a physical channel for sales as well. It holds creative markets in Taipei irregularly. This gives consumers who used to surf on the online website another way to learn about the designer's original product by communicating to the designers directly. And it offers the general public a chance to build their own unique life style when they are just walking on a Sunday afternoon.

Although Pinkoi is praised as Asia's largest online market, some people complain about the price of the products on Pinkoi. It was also criticized for hiring translator at very low wages. Still, it is no doubt that Pinkoi is spreading the power of design all over the world.

Cultural Discrimination

One warehouse retailer Carrefour has recently put up a “festival of French’s delicious food” as a promotion strategy. To advertize this event, it produced a commercial that tells of the story of a woman whose shopping decisions led into different futures. At the beginning of the film, the female protagonist stands in front of the bread section and considers what kind of bread she should buy. In the end, she chooses a cheaper bread instead of French bread because she thinks the latter is too expensive and she does not have to treat herself so well. However, after this decision, her life begins a downhill turn and she ends up eating Taiwanese night market food and living as ordinary people. In another scene, she chooses French bread and her life is changed toward “a much better” condition as she eats first-class Western food and lives a European lifestyle.

I can understand how the commercial is trying to say that French bread will change your luck in life. It may be a lie, but commercials are all lies. What really bothers me is the depictions of what a good or bad life looks like. For example, why is eating Taiwanese night market food the sign of a miserable life, while eating different types of French bread and living a European lifestyle makes us “winners”? This contrast actually reflects the severe cultural discrimination concerning Chinese inferiority that has been passed down in history since nineteenth century. As a defeated people under Western imperialism, the Chinese were forced to follow in the steps of the West by imitating Western diets, industry, lifestyle, and so on. This image of western supremacy was passed from generation to generation until now, and eventually displayed in this advertisement as eating foreign foods such as salad, bread, and steak is the sign of a winner, and living a superficially European lifestyle is considered high-class.

I think if this promotion film had displayed the concept of “cultural diversity” instead of “culture stratification”, showing us that French bread and Western food are just as delicious as Taiwanese food, then Carrefour would really be demonstrating the core spirit of “the festival of French’s delicious food”. Variety in food would enrich our taste and our life, while narrow-minded adoration of French food would only kill our own culture.

The Exclusive World of Name Brand Stores

Rounded by French windows, fashionable white lights glow softly during the night time. A doorman in a straight suit guards the door and gently opens it for the well-dressed customers at the Chanel flagship store. Standing in front of the magnificence of the huge building, one cannot help but scan one's own outfits and appearances in timid silence. It is obvious that while most businesses strive to attract more customers, designer brand stores have a way of arranging its appearance, decoration, or the uniform of the salesperson in the shopping environment that would turn away most people, except the most worthy.

Most of the name brands would set up flagship stores in all the major cities of the world, not necessarily to sell their merchandise, but more importantly to build up their image as desirable luxury stores and all of them aim to be unique in appearance. Paul Smith doses on its flagship store in Seoul, Korea, which looks like a liquid-smooth white object with holes on it for windows and an entrance just as a fancy art museum. The invitation extended to customers with good art temperaments actually intimidates regular folks. Other stores feature high ceilings and huge open spaces with only a few items on display. The emptiness of the store actually hints that the name brand products are few and rare, and hence of the highest quality, to be enjoyed by only the select few. At the same time, it also makes the customers stand out as they walk among the art-like merchandise. The special lighting that focuses on the merchandise enhances the texture of the goods, making the customers feel as if they themselves were on stage, performing with the merchandise. It is a place far from the ordinary, and makes the customers feel highly self-conscious of their presence in an unusual and sacred site. The aura of the stores hence makes common folks fearful of entering the stores; they simply feel they don't belong there, only the privileged may have admission. As the privileged will do their best to appear rich and dignified, anyone short of that performance will only feel the shame and stay away.

A mixed feeling may rise from the bottom of your heart when standing in front of these fabulous flagship stores, the glittering world of "the privileged." It is a sense of intimidation that belongs to the ordinary folks, for the building is simply too sparkling to step in. And through the flagship stores, the brands raise their value and desirability.

Enjoy Your Life at Eslite

In March 1989, a small bookstore that specialized in arts and humanities opened its doors in downtown Taipei. It was named "Eslite," the medieval French form of "elite," to announce its chosen image. Founder and president Wu Ching-yu had begun with a business selling kitchen equipment to hotels, but later turned to the book enterprise. It has been said that Taiwan's bookstore industry has gone through two waves of revolution, the first is the "quantity" revolution of 1983 brought from the Kingstone Bookstore; the second was in 1989 when Eslite set off the "quality" revolution. From the outset, Eslite focused on innovations that would turn the bookstore into a place of magic.

To begin with, unlike traditional bookstores or bookstore chain's clutter monotony, Eslite creates a high-quality reading space through designing an elegant, clean, open feeling, with advanced logs, 15-degree-tilted shelves for easy browsing, etc. Chairs and seating spaces welcome customers to take their time and read. Then Eslite chooses books in both depth and breadth and uses "Read categories" to help readers find their interest. Extensive collections in the popular or professional fields such as philosophy of thought, women studies, religious thought, gay issues, etc. make Eslite most attractive for serious readers. To promote its image as the cultural center of the city and to maintain customer interest, Eslite spares no effort to host cultural events and lectures as well as special exhibitions, some of which have become signature events in Taipei city. In 1999, Eslite set another milestone by becoming the first bookstore that operates 24 hours a day, hence changing the texture of Taipei city night life toward the cultural and the intellectual. Improved services and membership system also increase customer loyalty.

As it expands and builds more branch stores, Eslite adheres to the principle of "chain without copying", that is, every branch combines style and color of the local area, with a self-design and purpose. Eslite also combines art galleries, boutiques, stores, and other business spaces, but work them together to build a pluralistic but somewhat unified tonality of shopping experience. These strategies not only expand the scope of cross-industry alliance, but also explore the development of different cultural performance possibilities.

These innovations have made Eslite a leader in the cultural industries and a leading brand. The Eslite atmosphere is so representative of fashion and taste that people even use "very Eslite" as an adjective to describe an exquisite feeling. In a matter of 20 years, the birth of Eslite has become the "Eslite phenomenon" that stands for a cultural transformation. Now that online bookstores and online shopping are becoming popular, we will have to wait and see if the Eslite magic holds up.

The Unique Muji

Muji is a Japanese brand founded in the 1980s. At that time, Japanese society was enjoying its economic prosperity and people were putting their wealth on display by pursuing well-known luxury brands with splendid outstanding decorations. As a new comer, the brand Muji decided to go in the opposite direction and market their products with less wrapping, more nature, and absolute eco-friendliness.

Muji's products engage our daily lives, including food, clothes, stationary, small appliances, cosmetics...etc. Muji's design is mostly transparent and see-through, wrapping with a label sticker which is easily removed. There is no pattern on the product and it gives the consumer a plain and simple impression. It illustrates "less is more," and surprisingly, products without complex designs can still stand out as a brand. As for the decoration of the store, the wooden floors create a natural environment while soft and peaceful dim light and background music create a comfortable and relaxed shopping experience.

Many people think, since Muji does not do excessive decoration on their products, they should offer better prices because of the savings in cost. In fact, Muji does not lower its prices because it has made its "plain and simple" style into a brand and part of marketing. It is this distinguishing feature that is sold as its style. On top of the simplistic style, Muji claims that their food uses only seasonal produce, their tea is purchased through fair trade, and their flax clothes is thoroughly natural. These represent the quality and the environmentalist image of their product. As for the small appliances, Muji's simple home lifestyle contrasts with the hustle and bustle of the outside world and makes their customers feel at ease using the products. Relaxing in the simple atmosphere of the Muji home, customers experience a feeling of peace and rest, and also feeling proud that they have the good taste to choose Muji.

To me, a brand is not only about its product and appearance, but also a company's spirit. How to stand out from other brands and develop its own unique style is vital in the market nowadays. Muji has set an example of not following the trend but creating its own distinct no-brand image, which eventually leads to its success. It has gotten the customers' loyalty to support its "plain and simple" spirit.

Brand Image

It's not an uncommon sight that Starbucks shops are frequently crowded with throngs of coffee lovers, and even the seats there are never vacant. Although the prices of its products are unreasonably exorbitant, the number of its fans is still surging. Recently, an amusing experiment was conducted and found that about 80% of college students prefer drinking Starbucks coffee but can't tell the difference between Starbucks' coffee and the much less expensive City Café's coffee if the subjects were not told about the brands beforehand. If there is little difference, how did Starbucks create its brand image?

Shaping brand images is not confined to offering high-quality products but more importantly providing individualized services. The moment you step into Starbucks coffee shop, you can feel the friendly and warm-hearted atmosphere they try to create. The servers always wear a beaming smile and patiently explain diversified sorts of coffee commodities to the customers, as if they are acquaintances and are merely chatting. Obviously, Starbucks takes any service detail seriously, highly respecting and attending to each customer's spirits and emotions. Such client-oriented service is one of the successful methods for Starbucks to manage its brand image.

In addition to the conscientious on-site services, Starbucks spares no efforts to render its brand image widespread even beyond the stores and into people's lives. Starbucks coffee-related commodities, such as bottles, mug cushions, biscuit gifts, and so forth, are ready to permeate our daily life. The brand is then carried from the store to thousands of homes as a means of enhancing popularity. In 2007, Starbucks and National Palace Museum joined forces to launch a line of souvenirs with the combination of antique culture and modern designs of Starbucks. With the versatile approaches invading into the customers' lives, "Starbucks" has already been inscribed into our hearts, which serves as another effective strategy of brand managing.

Tens of thousands of brands surround us, but only a few of them can really stand out. Brand is not just a concrete logo or mark but can be granted a unique abstract meaning, and as soon as it attains this phase, the power of brands is unstoppable. Starbucks fully exerts the essence of its brand, rendering it outstanding among all coffee shops with its considerate services and multifarious marketing.

The Middle Class' Eslite Bookstore

We live in an age when the publishing industry is withering, and people scarcely buy books at the bookstores but do their reading on digital gadgets instead. If that is the case, then how would a bookstore continue to attract a great amount of customers, and even become a landmark that many foreign visitors list as a must-see? Well, I believe it's because the Eslite Bookstore is much more than just a bookstore but a place for the middle class to express their taste, lifestyle, and social status.

Though mainly a bookstore, Eslite Bookstore has made itself quite different from others. An abundance of books about art, cultures, and cities, many of which are imported and hard to find elsewhere, could be easily seen on the bookshelves. These sorts of books help the bookstore shape itself into a space with profound cultural depth, a feature that could appeal to many readers from the middle class. Besides, unlike other bookstores, Eslite Bookstore designs itself with much space for readers to stroll freely, to read comfortably, and to relax their minds completely, instead of packing the whole store with bookshelves and indirectly putting much pressure on customers.

Along with the cozy interior designs, the atmosphere in the bookstore perfectly matches the taste of the middle class, with classical and soft music playing around the clock, coffee and deserts served nearby, and lots of delicate creative and cultural products sold in the neighboring stores. At the Eslite Bookstore, a reader could savor a book in the soft light with the aroma of Espresso and the pleasant melodies of Pachelbel's Canon, while a dazzling array of beautiful arts and crafts are displayed around the store. Through this kind of atmosphere, the exquisite lifestyle that the Eslite Bookstore tries to create and deliver is greatly embraced and favored by most of the middle class.

While we appreciate how perfectly the Eslite Bookstore has created for us a space filled with art, culture, and exquisite lifestyles, it has also built a high-class corporate image and social status that edges out those considered not up to the standard of consumption and taste even though they may also be book-lovers. For those who love to visit the Eslite Bookstore, including me, this is something for us to ponder over and over again.

The YAMAHA Attack on Youth

Most of the advertisements for motorcycles depict a boy pursuing a girl as their main plot. It reveals that in Chinese culture, owning a motor mostly represents one's economic status, especially in relation to males. It is clear that YAMAHA Motor obviously targets young male consumers, but recently, it is re-characterizing the contemporary young men through the actor's new image: more feminine, pursuing an older girl, and after more than one girl.

Contrary to the traditional image of the male as quite masculine, YAMAHA Motor's new commercial creates a different image of the young man as more feminine, with longer hair and delicate features, not only cute but also riding a colorful motorcycle. The young man seems kinder and easy to get along with. Instead of the muscular, hence crude, male, the advertisement provides consumers with a unique value that meets modern values. Secondly, the boy is not only pursuing a girl but a girl that is older than he is. This goes against the convention that a boy must be older than his mate so as to ensure his superiority not only in age but also in economic power. However, in contemporary times, more and more TV drama series portray the new model of romantic relation between an older woman and a younger man. So the YAMAHA commercial is following the trend, which may help revolutionize intimate relations. Third, the boy boldly admits that he not only pursues one girl but had already done the same to more than one girl. In the past, the main character would have been portrayed as faithful and persistent in chasing after one girl, but now the young man feels no shame or guilt in proclaiming his great achievement in gathering more "trophies." The image is also different from the past when love is portrayed as innocent and pure.

Despite those differences, the commercial still retains some original characteristics of males. For example, the ambition and pride of classical males are still present in the commercial. A man's ambition can be proven through his career or through his romantic pursuits. The commercial hints that the boy will succeed and eventually get the girl, which not only satisfies the desires of the young males but also stimulates their fantasy of becoming sexually potent and active. Fortunately, the commercial also allows the older girl to take the lead by riding a motorcycle and taking the boy as passenger. In one place, the slogan in the commercial describes both the motorcycle and the young man as "色" which could mean "the colorfulness" of the motorcycles or the "sexually hungry" young man. In that sense, the commercial cleverly appeals to the young male consumers on more than one level.

YAMAHA's new motorcycle commercial directly evokes young male consumers' desires, making them believe that they would not be losers if they ride YAMAHA Motorcycles. It uses the experiences that a majority of young males have encountered in their lives, not only helping them to solve the problem but earning them the opportunity of pursuing girls. Based on the consumption, the commercial establishes a new connection between YAMAHA Motor and young males.

Branding a Class

I learned very early that a person can be built as an excellent brand, with a wonderful reputation and being admired by many.

When I was in junior high school, although the competence-based class grouping policy had already been abolished, my school still secretly grouped straight-A students into one class, and assigned a senior homeroom teacher to us who was famous for her stringency. Since the first day of class, she had insisted that we regard our class as a famous brand with the most outstanding students. To achieve and maintain this quality, we must watch every detail of our student life, such as handing in our homework on time, paying attention in class, getting good grades, and always behaving politely. Without a doubt, we did every effort to fulfill the goal and experienced a lot of bitterness at the same time. Led by our strict homeroom teacher, we needed to not only finish at least five sheets of quiz paper per day, but also correct every single wrong answer, and even had to let our parents sign the exam paper to make sure they were aware of our progress. If we failed to perform up to the standards of our brand class, our punishment would be the lashing of our palms with a wooden bat. Under that kind of pressure, we naturally did our best and performed well in both disciplinary performance and academic achievement and became a famous brand.

This training process may sound harsh, yet it actually did us all a lot of good. To begin with, as an excellent brand, our quality of performance was favored by the consumers, our subject teachers, who always entered our classroom with a joyful mood and a big smile on their faces as we kept a great relationship with them. During class, because of our eagerness to learn, the teachers were also encouraged to teach all the knowledge they have. Every time we got a new group of subject teachers as the new semester opened, they were already looking forward to meeting us because our good quality was known by every teacher in the school. Our good reputation left such a deep impression on our teachers that every time I ran into any of my teachers on the streets after graduation, they always recognized me as well as my classmates, which made us very proud.

As a brand, we did our utmost to deliver the best quality work to the customers. During the process, we produced fantastic performance and gained loyal customers. We also cultivated good personalities and learned the importance of self-respect. If our student life can be compared to a brand-making process, then we find our value has greatly improved as we grow toward our life's fulfillments.

Instagram

A picture is worth a thousand words. Imagine a place where you can simply record your life with posting pictures. Well, welcome to Instagram.

I was in high school when I first joined Instagram. My friends described this app to me as “Sort of like Facebook, but you mostly post pictures.” I was reluctant to use it in the beginning because I thought Facebook was already a convenient enough social media for me, why bother to be on two social medias that have basically the same functions? Besides, most people at that time were not yet familiar with the new app, little did we know that it’s going to be all the rage in the near future.

Although Facebook has the largest user base and has withstood the test of time, teenagers and students of my age now prefer Instagram over Facebook, me included. Why is that? The following are a couple of reasons that make the most sense to me. First of all, with 24 different filters on it, Instagram provides us an opportunity to make up for our blemishes. We can use those filters to transform the most ordinary pictures into appealing images. In a world where appearance means everything, this image-based app is definitely what we need.

Second, Image is powerful, but it is also superficial. Since people tend to judge others based on the pictures they post on Instagram, sometimes we manage to trick others into believing what type of people we are by posting certain kinds of images. It is our call to post whatever pictures we want and to create images that may or may not be true to our personal life. In other words, Instagram is also an escape from the real world. It is a fantasy land where we can be whoever we want and where everything is possible.

All in all, not only can Instagram complement our shortcomings and allow us to be the person that we’ve always dreamed of, most important of all, it gives us hope. Hope that no matter how black and white things may seem to be, there is always a way to lighten up the situation. Hope that the person we want to be does exist, and we can get a glimpse of who that person might be. With Instagram, I will carry on the hope and try my earnest to live out my ideal life.

Broadcast Yourself

I am convinced that “focus” is an indispensable factor for the success of any brand. Compared with diversity, most consumers prefer specialization of brands. Take Youtube for example, it’s the first video sharing platform with wide popularity and it wins the favor of the market through its slogan “Broadcast yourself” as it completely focuses on the creators of videos. Youtube takes advantage of the strategy of focusing on the producers to draw in consumers, and this conception has brought them great success in the long term.

“Broadcast yourself” is the central conception of Youtube, as it emphasizes immediate sharing at absolutely no charge and it can be inserted in every website easily. There had been a company called “Z.com” which had a similar idea to Youtube and had all the factors for success, such as funding, talented employees, and an effective commercial pattern; yet, it was not able to solve the problem of encoding at the time. Youtube was lucky in that this difficulty was solved by Adobe Flash soon after it was set up. In addition to the technical superiority, Youtube provides normal people with a stage to perform, and helps other brands to explore business opportunities. For those who want to become well-known, Youtube is a best platform as, compared with static pictures, videos are more splendid and attractive in catching the audience’s attention and admiration.

Openness and diversity of Youtube have brought out plenty of Internet celebrities. They may come from funny short videos, singing competitions, or live broadcasts of games. “Ray Du English” uses a relaxed and humorous method to teach English, “Amo Ku” introduces plots of films in a few minutes with his nonsensical comment, and “This group of people” shoots funny videos with daily themes—these are all famous examples of Internet celebrities in Taiwan. With the popularity of Youtube growing day by day, it has also become more beneficial for advertisers to spread their fame and increase the exposure of their brands on Youtube. More and more consumers also tend to upload their videos about a variety of products so as to share, to launch a comment on it, or just for propaganda purposes.

Although Youtube is now sitting on top of the success ladder, it should always endeavor to do still better. After all, no one can guarantee a brand would be everlasting, and even Google, Apple, and other great brands are already raising awareness and seeking ever greater perfection. In my opinion, Youtube needs to deal with three serious problems at the present: poor video quality, strict standards in copyrighting, and excessive advertisements. Solutions to these problems may not be easy to manage, but the survival of the Youtube brand depends on it.

Racing

In Kymco's "Racing" commercial, a young couple is riding on the same motorcycle when the girlfriend on the back seat asks her boyfriend if he loves her. Because the boy does not respond quickly enough, the girl becomes angry, tells him to stop the bike, and throws her bag all the way onto a taxi under the bridge crossing, causing the boy to chase after the taxi in order to get her bag back. In the process of racing, various functions and superiorities of the bike are introduced to the audience. With smooth and skillful riding, the boy returns the bag to his girlfriend. She hugs him but says that the boy does that only because he loves racing. The boy replies to her that she just loves her bag.

It is clear that Kymco's commercial is aiming at young people and using romance to add to the lure of the motorcycle. The dangerous car chasing scene reminds youngsters of those overconfident reckless behaviors they themselves have been involved in, but at the same time it also offers people a romantic feeling as the boy is oblivious to all the risk as he races through the dangerous traffic for his girlfriend's handbag. However, from my viewpoint, the most important message that the commercial passes on to its audience is the gender stereotypes depicted in the commercial.

First, though there are both genders in the commercial, the only one who gets to ride the motorcycle is the boy, as the girl passively waits for the boy, which implies that only men are the agents of action. The capability of controlling the vehicle (motorcycle) also indicates that men have more power to make their own decisions and that they can go anywhere while women can only rely upon the men for her mobility. Second, the girl is portrayed as a temperamental child who makes trouble out of nothing. Regardless of the possible dangers her boyfriend might face, she asks him to stop the motorcycle in the middle of traffic and even throws her bag out just because she does not get any response from the boyfriend on a nonsensical question. In contrast, the boy is portrayed as a responsible male figure, cleaning up the mess his girlfriend makes with outstanding skills in racing.

Technology products are often given gender temperaments so as to create a connection with different sexes and to sell to certain genders. Motorcycle commercials tend to be more masculine and often feature males as the main characters. Even though there are female characters in it, they are often stereotyped as in the Kymco commercial. Hopefully, as society values more gender equality, there might be fewer gender-stereotypical commercials in the future.

How Does Apple Stand Out

Nowadays, smartphones have become extremely popular and mobile companies work very hard to create new products to lure consumers into buying the newest models. Among all the brands producing smartphones, Apple always takes the first place. Once a new Apple product makes its debut, it always attracts the faithful followers to wait in long lines at every retail store. How does Apple do it? Is there any marketing blitz behind the brand?

I think Apple made it because of its unique advances in technology. Apple has an isolated system called iOS in their serial products. Compare with the Android system which relies on the CPU to operate phones or apps, the iOS system adopts the GPU as it enables the iOS system to work more quickly and fluently. Also, Apple is good at creating consumer need even before they realize they need it. Apple assumes that the customers don't know what they actually need, so the company strives to stand in their shoes and think up new ideas to amaze the customers. The creation of the iPad is a good example. In the past, we only had the Mac and the iPhone, and never anticipated that there could be a facility called the iPad that straddles between them. The iPad not only improves the disadvantages of the iPhone, such as its small screen, but also is easily portable, unlike the Mac. Thus, when the iPad hit the whole market, it was very welcomed by customers.

Most importantly, Apple is very good at using various strategies to “hook” its customers, especially right before it launches new products. Before the launch, all information about the new product will be kept secret. When Steve Jobs created the first iPhone, he just showed the appearance of the new phone without mentioning any innovative functions. Later, Apple released an advertising video which featured many Hollywood stars using iPhone and ended the film with a simple word Hello. The seemingly simple promotion sparked the great interests of the audience. People kept discuss it online and asking thousands of questions by mail about iPhone to Apple. The core concept of Apple is: “never let the advertisements steal the products’ thunder.” So, it maintains a low profile, and then takes the public by a storm. That is how Apple nurtures its sense of mystery to attract consumers. However, it also runs the risk of running people’s expectations so high that they get disappointed easily if the product fails to meet their dreams.

As the most notable and popular brand among all the cellphone incorporations, Apple wins respect and also suffers some criticism. In spite of that, it is still followed by countless Apple fans who are very concerned about the brand. It is said that people who have iPhones will never take another brand into consideration the next time they buy a new cellphone. Perhaps, it is the very enthusiasm and design concept that make this brand, Apple, stand out among all the other brands.

A Medicine for Brand Crisis

A brand isn't merely a name or a pattern but a contract with clients, where a company can deliver its product's value and promises and build customers' trust and loyalty. Undoubtedly, a trusted, successful brand can greatly benefit a company since its high value will reflect on the prices of the products. However, a flaw of products can enormously blemish its brand, especially for those well-known companies loved by the public. Hence, how to rebuild its brand image is a test of wisdom.

Take Toyota, a world-famous automobile manufacturer, for example. Toyota had long been considered a quality brand but in 2009, a sudden unintended acceleration in a Lexus small family car claimed four lives of a family. The flaw was identified as a possible mechanical sticking of the accelerator pedal, which later led to the tragedy. The unfortunate news not only caused high concern worldwide but greatly destroyed Toyota's brand image which was more valuable than its products. To salvage its reputation, Toyota announced an urgent vehicle recall worldwide in 2010. It even brought about the partial suspension of production and selling.

Apart from the subsequent repairs and renewed promotion of its professional image, Toyota adopted a new approach to rebuild consumers' loyalty. Micro movies about love and featuring celebrities are released constantly to bond with customers. For instance, one last-year micro movie, "Family Trip," featured Taiwanese actor Shiou Chieh-kai. In this movie, the actor recalls memories of the trips in his childhood with his father driving a Toyota. As the movie goes on, he becomes adult enough to take over the steering wheel and he also drives a Toyota to travel with his father. The movie ends up in two emotional sentences, "Family, is like a trip. Staying together is our destination." Toyota's car is presented as the emotional connection between family members. With it, you can safely travel with your beloved family and create unforgettable memories. The car will no longer be a killer but a place filled with safety, warmth, and love.

Emotional commercials have proven to be effective in mending a company's negative, badly damaged brand image by reclaiming the brand's value which can then resonate and develop experiential relationships with consumers. But as consumers, we would do well to guard against such persuasive strategies, for our own sake.

Instant Noodles, Instant Fantasy

For many of us, instant noodles show up in our meals only at the end of the month when our pockets are short on cash. But, recently they are becoming much more than that.

That day, I was browsing through youtube, suddenly, a video popped up with a man's voice, "Hello, Mei Mei, what are you going to have today?" Oh no, it is advertisement again! But this time the customers and the chef in the noodle shop on the screen looked like the setting in a popular Japanese drama, "深夜食堂", which happens to be one of my favorites. I was attracted by the exquisite Japanese-style decorations in the noodle shop. Is this really a drama? Or is it advertising for some new restaurant? My curiosity drew me on and I watched all the commercials in this series of short films put up by a famous instant noodles brand.

In the noodle stories, the plot has a basic structure. Various kinds of customers come to the noodle shop to eat noodles and tell their unique life stories: the friendship between volleyball girls, a mother's concern about her son's unfinished wish, and of course, immature love stories. The steady character in these stories remains the same: the kind and understanding owner of the noodle shop who is also a wonderful listener. And in the context of the various life stories, the same instant noodle suddenly becomes something alive and different as it comforts the characters who are faced with different difficulties. The slogan "Flavored with different moods" (以心情調味) tells the viewers that there are different tastes of Uni-President noodles for your every mood, yet actually it's the warm stories that give different flavors to the same instant noodles.

The mission of these noodle stories is to give the 30-year-old increasingly boring Uni-President noodles some brand new meanings. The short films may not be as attractive as the Oscar movies, but they accord with the image of Uni-President noodles: approachable. The noodles are approachable but also out of the ordinary because of the stories in which the noodles were made comforting. In this new marketing strategy, Uni-President noodles choose not to focus on how delicious the noodles are (which they are not), but on the life stories of the characters and the role that the noodles and the noodle shop play in people's lives. In those daily stories, memories of instant noodles in one's childhood return in full strength. As a result, my dinner for that night was Uni-President noodles; I wanted to experience those stories because they could be my life stories too.

MOS Mothers

People usually think “mother” symbolizes warmth and all wonderful feelings. And may be that is the reason why MOS Burger chooses “mother” as their brand image.

The MOS commercial features five employees who are all middle-aged women who look like typical mothers. I think MOS wants to use the image of the mother to give the customers a sense of trust when it comes to food. The most impressive scene is when one of employees says that when she joins MOS Burger to work, she surprisingly discovers that MOS cares about every detail. For example, the company asks their employees to pay attention to how many grams of peanut butter should be spread on the toast, or how much mayonnaise should be added to one hamburger. It shows that MOS prepares every order very carefully. Coming from a mother figure, the compliment implies that MOS Burger is more careful in those details than when mothers prepare our breakfast at home. And the mothers even have to work at MOS Burgers to learn to be the best mother.

One again, MOS has taken advantage of the mother’s role to create its corporate image, and at the same time it proudly shows that MOS can do so much better than our mothers.

Two Branding Lessons We Should Learn From Apple

Apple has never failed in today's competitive market. That's because they know the market demands and always try to package the corporation and its products as remarkable and mysterious. They never release any information to the public before they formally unveil the new products or functions; they even make up some skillful marketing strategy and branding method, for instance, locating their own retail stores in key cities and near many luxuriant shopping malls to build up a fashion image for the product, thus making people feel that what they have in hand is coming from a boutique. But I think the most important keys to Apple's success are: first, they "think differently," and second, "they put themselves in the customer's shoes." These are the core values at Apple Inc.

To "think differently," Apple chooses innovation, fashion, and uniqueness as their brand position, emphasizing a distinctive and exclusive living style, thus they successfully deliver to their customers an unusual value proposition that firmly grasps the users' hearts and turns them into believers. On the other hand, Apple also reflects on how to continuously surpass themselves and pursue excellence, so the frequency and speed they abandon their old products is much faster than other brands, which means they must be far-sighted and forward-thinking to maintain in the leading position. If we can learn from Apple and think differently from others, we will not only gain what has not been imagined before but make ourselves stand out and let our talent and advantages be seen by people.

If you want to have people's recognition and respect, you should always stand in others' shoes yourself so as to take their concerns into consideration. It will not only help better interpersonal relationships but also enhance your self-value. Take what Apple has done since its beginning for example. Every "I" series they released aim to strongly connect with the social values and life styles of the young generation so that people can operate those products easily, smartly, and feel that those things are really user-friendly. Once that is achieved, consumers will give Apple their enthusiasm, respect, and high praise in return, and Apple can thus market themselves by word of mouth.

Apple has come to define the future not only because of their high technology and excellent hardware but because of their particular thinking and service attitude. To sum up, in this highly competitive world, all of us have to enrich ourselves in our professional abilities firstly, to the extent that we can bring what we have learnt into full play in no time. And later, through the establishment and improvement of personal branding, value, and attitude, we will truly we have the power to make our life better.

How Does IKEA Stand Out in the Furniture Industry

In 1943, 17-year-old Ingvar Kamprad founded IKEA as a low-price grocery store selling cheap life necessities. As its business expands, IKEA began its furniture series and now it is probably the best-known international furniture chain in the world. How did they do it?

IKEA's biggest difference from other furniture industries lies in their experiential marketing. That is, to give customers the freedom to move around the exhibitions and touch the furniture they are interested in. In addition, IKEA also offers free trial products for consumers, which can be refunded unconditionally in 30 days. It even conducted destructive experiments on the products to prove its quality. This practice was an innovation at the time. People loved the idea very much, because traditionally, customers must pay a high price for those furniture they cannot touch before buying, but now IKEA gives them the chance. Also, Kamprad believes that furniture should be displayed in situations so that the quality and feature of the products can be fully presented. When consumers enter IKEA, it's like entering an ideal world where all the things they see can become part of their home. These fresh and original ideas not only received great sympathy and laid the foundation of the modern concept of today's IKEA but also put the store on the leading position in the global furniture industry.

In today's highly competitive world, corporate image has become a very important marketing strategy, and IKEA was no exception. To show that it takes the social responsibility to humans and the environment, IKEA creates a business style that is friendly to humanity and the Earth. When IKEA produces low-price and functional products for millions of consumers worldwide, they are committed to finding suppliers that conform to the values and guidelines of environmental friendliness, labor rights, protection and management of forestry, etc.. IKEA strives to use renewable energy, environmental technology, and renewable and recyclable materials, and minimize waste and pollution with a view to reducing the impact of climate anomalies of the Earth. All IKEA suppliers meet the same responsibility demands from the production of each commodity in line with IKEA's qualified work environment.

Finally, IKEA shows its consideration for consumers on the move by offering large cardboard boxes for free. Packaging tips, moving checklist, and some special products for your new home are printed on the inside of the boxes. These free accessible cardboards can be found at a few important sites in the city of Montreal with signs that say, "Please take me home and fill me!" From this example we can see that IKEA not only creates a very valuable service for consumers but also cleverly turns this act of kindness into occasions for powerful advertising.

Pxmart, a Supermarket that befriends you

Taiwan's hypermarkets and supermarkets all have foreign capital behind them, except for Pxmart, a 100-percent Taiwanese company. It is better known as "Chuan Lian center", which was formerly a low-priced grocery store the government had set up for military personnel, government officials and teachers to buy their daily necessities, and special cards were required for entry. Later, it became a company in late 1998 and was taken over and transformed into a privately owned enterprise, open to the general public. The question remains: how can a grocery store successfully become one of the most popular supermarkets in Taiwan?

Compared with its rivals that merely emphasize "low price," Pxmart takes the opposite approach and adopts a self-satiric advertising technique that enables Pxmart to turn its disadvantages into advantages. For instance, in their commercials, a poker faced anchorman lists the weaknesses of the Pxmart: no exquisite store signs, no fine floor tiles, no awesome staff uniform, no parking lot for customers, no wide shopping space, no credit card accepted, to name but a few. It seems that they are all drawbacks. However, the videos also implies that the company saves all the trimmings in order to devote itself to cutting prices for the customers, such as providing more discounts or buying products at relatively low cost. Moreover, the firm's boss wants to maintain the retailer's status as a discounter that serves as "the community's good neighbor," manifested in its proximity to local neighborhoods and bare-bone interiors and store signs.

Likewise, Pxmart's commercials are really comical, artless, and somehow a little bit stupid; yet, they successfully attract the audience's attention. For example, in one of its commercials, the poker-faced anchorman teaches aerobic exercise with a motley group of people, ranging from the elderly to the young, and he calls it a "national money-saving exercise." The exercise includes taking things from the left shelf to the right one and putting them into the shopping cart and repeating the move, or taking two products with two hands and reading their nutrition facts from left to right, or raising your hands to reach the merchandise on the top shelves and then putting the merchandise down into the carts, or pulling the cart and simultaneously grabbing things to put into the carts, putting things on the checkout counters and lifting the shopping bags, and so on. Apparently, the commercial conveys the funny idea that if people come to this store to shop, they can not only save money but also do exercise at the same time, and that commercial makes the customers feel that Pxmart is amiable, friendly and entertaining.

The funny commercials do more than merely impress the audience, some of them actually educate people about how to be economical. In one commercial, the anchorman uses the Pxmart membership card to squeeze the last bit of the toothpaste out of the tube, or he uses the card to scrape together the cookie crumbs so as not to waste any of it. Obviously, the company instills the concept of "no waste" into the viewers. In comparison with other rivals, Pxmart gradually gains the image of an economy shopping place while it advocates the cause of making life better and friendlier.

All in all, although the commercials of Pxmart are really kuso and zany, I think the anchorman telling lame jokes with a poker face is the key to this sales strategy, as he represents the supermarket as sincere and honest, which then works to build up the

trust of viewers. When Pxmart adopts such an amusing image, it has truly won the hearts of the audience who may very easily become customers.