

New Brand Management Scenarios on the Spanish Market

Nuevos escenarios de Gestión de marcas en el mercado español

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RESUMEN: Los cambios profundos que han impactado sobre el mercado de la comunicación y la gestión de marca en los albores del siglo XXI han llevado a hablar de la aparición de un nuevo paradigma. Ese cambio sustancial, que transforma las relaciones tradicionales entre emisores y receptores, reclama una redefinición de los escenarios profesionales, de los agentes de la comunicación, así como de los receptores, a la hora de relacionarse con la información y con las marcas.

El presente estudio se realizó en el mercado español, prestando especial atención a los procesos de creación y gestión de contenidos, a través de una investigación cualitativa que combina tres técnicas –Delphi a expertos del mundo de los medios, marketing y publicidad; grupos de discusión con expertos en comunicación, marcas y medios, y entrevistas en profundidad a usuarios avanzados en nuevas tecnologías.

El objetivo principal de este artículo es mostrar una visión panorámica sobre el discurso de las marcas tanto de producto como corporativas, así como clarificar *qué* esperan y *cómo* reciben los públicos de interés estas comunicaciones.

Los principales hallazgos señalan una gran conciencia de cambio de los principales agentes, así como una percepción de protagonismo por parte de los públicos, que han acabado por asumir que la construcción de marca los afecta personalmente.

Palabras clave: gestión de marcas, intangibles, medios, publicidad, España.

ABSTRACT: Far-reaching changes that affected the communication and brand management market at the dawn of the 21st century led to talks about the birth

of a new paradigm. This significant change, which transformed relationships between senders and receivers, demands a redefinition of scenarios for professionals and communication agents, as well as for receivers taking an interest in the information and brands.

This study was carried out on the Spanish market, focusing largely on the creation and management of content through qualitative research combining three methods - Delphi for media, marketing and advertising experts, discussion groups with communication, branding and media experts, and in-depth interviews for advanced users of new technologies.

The main objective of this article is to provide a panoramic view of brand discourse for both products and companies, in addition to clarifying *what* public interest groups expect and *how* they receive such communications.

The main findings show that the principal agents are very aware of this change, and that the interest groups see themselves as protagonists and have accepted the fact that brand building affects them personally.

Keywords: Brand Management, Intangibles, Media, Advertising, Spain.

INTRODUCTION

Brand management is understood to be how strategies are used by institutions to preserve, modify or build strong brands that grow and survive in highly competitive markets. Brand management has travelled far over the last century, and its entry into the new millennium brought a different focus on communication, which many authors were quick to call a «New Paradigm».

1. MAIN DIMENSIONS OF THE NEW BRAND MANAGEMENT ON THE SPANISH MARKET

With the arrival of the 21st century, strategic and commercial communication was found to have new approaches which could no longer be slotted into, or researched via the traditional media and strategic communication model and integrated marketing communications IMC (Díaz-Soloaga, 2002). Digital technology promotes and feeds great changes, and the role of the public and its influence on the media and publicity makes business communication and brands into a horizontal activity with a diverse presence, far removed from the control and inflexibility of the past.

This innovative model could be seen in the various communication systems and processes and needs to be redefined. The aim of this paper is to display the main dimensions of a new communication scenario that is shaping current brand management in the Spanish market.

To this end, four basic aspects contained in the study, which was performed between January and June 2015, must be presented.

1.1. The undeniable value of intangible assets

Recently, corporate, commercial and persuasive communication has definitely turned towards the management of a company or institution's intangible assets (Cañibano and Sánchez, 2004; Hussi, 2004; Yalwe and Buscemi, 2004; Alloza, 2013). In this respect, creating value for corporations inevitably treads the path of managing intangible assets, with these understood as corporate social responsibility, corporate identity, organisational culture, and brand and reputation management. These aspects lack physical being, but are of prime importance in the smooth running of institutions. In fact, communication has been gradually dematerializing and moving away from the products to focus unexpectedly on these assets, which are supported by actions, results, behaviour, fulfilling promises and going through with proposals.

From the 1990s, Spain has witnessed a different way of communicating that has affected intangible aspects of companies and institutions in particular (Villafañe, 2014). Owing to the rapprochement between the areas of business management and communication management, we have witnessed the gradual integration of the communications department at management level, for making strategic decisions in the company. Added to this fact is the contribution of the stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984, 2011) aimed at interest groups, which has provided a basic theoretical underlay for scientific literature on the management of intangible assets by incorporating the idea that the public and businesses share a common purpose. Therefore, a company extends its mission, vision and values and starts to look further afield toward a future that has to be built together with the other agents in civil, social and political life.

From this standpoint, companies and institutions try to build brand value from the concept of strategic alignment, where only strong brands with a difference, able to streamline their brand policies into the following three approaches, will survive:

- a) Commercial, centred on managing products for consumers.
- b) Multi-disciplinary, seeking value from various functional areas for the special interest groups.
- c) Corporate, aiming to integrate the company and stakeholders into the corporate brand (Hatch and Shultz, 2010).

On the other hand, still speaking of the Spanish market, many initiatives have acted as the driving force for the new scenario since the beginning of the 21st century. Worthy of mention is the work by the Global Observatory of Intangible Assets, which has been analysing communication and intangible asset management in Spain and Latin America every year for 15 years (Villafañe, 2014); the creation of Corporate Excellence consultancy as a think tank for intangible assets, with representation from the most pertinent companies in the IBEX 35 Spanish stock index, such as academic experts; the growth of professional associations, like DIRCOM (Association of Communication Directors), DIRSE (Association of Social Responsibility Directors), and AEBrand (Spanish Association of Branding Companies), among many more academic and professional undertakings.

According to this first unifying axis, talking about the management of intangible assets and brand management is almost like speaking of the same thing because, in short, companies, institutions and society as active agents have created a new ecosystem, where intangible assets are the real assets for all types of receiver.

1.2. The consumer as an asset in brand management

Secondly, it should be said that consumers have altered the way they relate to companies and brands. Almost without wanting to, they have become key players in the new brand management scenario.

People have become immune to advertisements and show a profound knowledge of marketing. At the same time, they have developed extraordinary publicity skills, born of long experience of being exposed to the media, especially television, radio, the cinema, the press and the outside world. This means that many of the advertisers' efforts have been nullified, leaving companies open to investigating new formulas to reach out to the latest generation of consumers (Boschma, 2008, Gil and Romero, 2008). Lack of confidence in the intentions of publicity messages and brand strategies encouraged them to choose direct, participative communication methods, where they could have

an active role and become involved by generating content (Martí and Muñoz, 2006), to the point that they have now become senders of advertising messages or *prosumers*, taking part in the process of building a brand through storytelling (Salmon, 2008).

Marketing departments in companies no longer concentrate on a primary interest in their products and services, but pay attention to managing their consumers. From the 1990s, transaction marketing has been redirected towards marketing relationships, meaning that the consumer-customer is now seen as a company asset, whose capital value can be analysed from a financial point of view (Clifton, 2009, Cristopher, Payne and Ballantyne, 1994, Chiesa de Negri, 2005).

In the communication field, this approach is consolidated through the current theory, *Integrated Marketing Communications* (IMC), rooted in academic and professional areas. IMC promotes a consumer and communication-oriented view as a pivotal element in building relationships between the brand and its consumers and stakeholders (Schultz, Tannenbaum & Lauterborn, 1993). McCarthy's four Ps make way for the consumer-oriented view of the four Cs: consumer, cost, convenience, communication. Since then, the IMC concept has been greatly developed from various points of view and approaches placing integrated marketing communication within «management philosophy», «educational movement», or even «business management practice», (Porcu, Del Barrio and Kitchen, 2012: 319). Several authors have contributed to developing IMC theories (Duncan and Everett, 1993; Kotler, 1997; Percy, Rossiter and Elliot, 2012; Schultz, 1993; Schultz and Kitchen 1997; Pickton and Broderick, 2001 and Duncan and Muhler, 2004, among others).

1.3. The shared brand: the relevance of brand content and experience

The loss of materiality which has been a feature of communication over the last 15 years was made possible by the growing importance that brands gave to the symbolism of consumption. Storytelling and the user's own contribution to creating the contents on social networks and platforms has facilitated the process which is now in full swing.

Faced with reduced traditional commercial communication, brands have resorted to new ways of continuing to build their image; after all, the brand belongs to consumers, who create it from myriad of impacts and experiences generated deliberately or accidentally by institutions. To achieve the so-called «brand resonance», in Keller's (2008) words, it is necessary to work from

prominence (brand awareness), brand performance, imagery, judgements and opinions.

For that reason, brands have opted for storytelling to build robust tales that strengthen brand value around ideas far removed from the product and company, and much closer to culturally shared ideas underlying society (Grant, 2012).

The use of storytelling, therefore, seems required but not enough, since it is now essential for the brand content to flow through the networks, various platforms and fragmented media. Certain content first went viral in about 2005-2006, but gave way to more sophisticated strategies to achieve record-breaking downloads, views, likes, etc.; in short, to gain brand recognition.

In professional practice, this has led to brands trusting in multi-channel content strategies, called *cross media*, multiple platforms, hybrid media, intertextual commodity, transmedial worlds, transmedial interactions, multimodality or intermedia, although the concept that has proved strongest was proposed by Henry Jenkins: transmedia storytelling (Scolari, 2013). Transmedia storytelling is a type of story that unfolds through many types of media, and in which some consumers play an active role in the expansion process (Scolari, 2013). Transferring this concept to brand management allows us to talk about branding transmedia, in that a brand uses not only television, cinema or any advertising medium, but also books, comics, webisodes/mobisodes, the Internet, apps, online video games, social networks, wikis and alternative reality games. In addition, the consumer becomes a «prosumer», since the media context and techno-digital changes have encouraged production of content.

Thus, content is a key factor nowadays for brands in Spain. This has to be understood as branded content, meaning not only advertising, but also entertainment promoted by the brand and its users through any type of media (bought, owned or earned).

However, together with the centrality of content, the value of brand experiences has become a key force in achieving an emotional relationship with the consumer and subsequent loyalty (Lenderman and Sánchez, 2008). The brand must be enjoyed, shared, experienced and even loved by all stakeholders (Gobé, 2001, Roberts, 2005 and Albert, Merunka & Vallete-Florence, 2008). Most companies on the Spanish market these days offer consumers brand experiences, obtained not only through communication, but also various ways of acting and presentation (doing).

In short, the new brand management involves combining the storytelling of a brand with its own storydoing, as it all influences the audiences' perception.

1.4. The media, channels and creators

To a large extent, the great changes in brand management have been advanced by the digital revolution, which has enabled the much desired interactivity between brands and consumers.

A technological convergence has arisen that allows the brand to be everywhere at once on various platforms and devices (Salaverría, 2005). This brand omnipresence makes the traditional media planning system much more complex, as finding micro-targets is more difficult in mass media, and changes to managing customised communication with each individual through interactive media and social networks.

Moreover, the media landscape has to deal with another set of convergences affecting brand management, especially content and narrative hybridisation making no difference between traditional types of information, fiction, entertainment and publicity (Fernández Blanco, 2008).

The far-reaching transformation in the media system has caused brands to stop thinking that the «paid» and mass media are the only valid ones for relating to their interest groups, and include the owned media (point of sale, site, e-commerce, employees and company social networks), and the earned media (conversations generated on the brand on social networks and other spaces) in their strategies. This means that these days good brand managers oversee the brand in bought media, through media agencies and their own means, mostly from the company, with the aim of generating conversations on social networks and blogs and to arouse interest among influencers.

There seems to be a glimpse of how the bought media support the brand in positioning and brand image, while the owned media try to work more with the customer's lifetime value through engagement and a close relationship.

Although this approach has only recently been included in media planning in Spain, it is certainly still slowly breaking into the media research market. It should be mentioned here that the leading companies in the Spanish advertising sector (Infoadex, Kantar Media, EGM) continue to handle formats of the earlier model, which give a scant explanation of the segmentation and diversification of the formats found in commercial communication, and which are managed in the agencies, associations and other corporate benchmarks. Therefore, it must be stated that the media industry is still plunged into a digital transformation process where its greatest challenge is to provide customised content relevant to the target markets.

2. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this research is to define the new brand communication scenarios in the current market in Spain.

As secondary objectives, the first is to determine aspects defining the change of model that is happening in the interaction between brands and their various special interest groups. Second is to analyse the discourse by communication professionals and advanced users in relation to the new languages used and content and platforms, in order to find trends in the sector. Lastly, current systems for measuring the effectiveness of brand management are defined to determine its evolution.

3. METHOD

It was thought appropriate to use several techniques, due the complexity of the proposed objectives. The Delphi method was chosen, as it was decided that, since the 1960s, the study of discourse has been one of the most useful resources in research for establishing an approach to the underlying reasons for social change (Reguant-Álvarez and Torrado-Fonseca, 2016).

The method enables key factors to be detected, so as to find the latest trends relating to brands; in addition, the experts provide the information directly, with no intermediaries (Rowe and Wright, 1999).

In order to carry out field work with the technique, the professional categories were divided into four panels: Academics and research experts; those in the corporate field, marketing and advertising; and agency and media planning specialists. They were all recruited by e-mail and answered the questionnaires designed in two parts: the first was carried out on 27 March to 15 April 2015, and the second between 5 and 21 May 2015. Their opinions were gathered on the main lines of work and emerging innovation in brand management and communication processes associated with these: communication trends for the brand and consumers, effects of advertising on the commercial brand, content and formats in brand communication, the influence of consumers in managing and creating messages and measuring effectiveness.

Secondly, group discussions were held, which is an appropriate technique for explaining people's thoughts, that is to say, how they feel and explain their particular situations, based on discourse analysis as a way of obtaining information. The groups took place on 28 and 29 April and 5 May, with communication, brand, media and information and communication technologies (ICT)

specialists. All the participants were opinion leaders in general printed media, and specialist communication, advertising, branding, CSR and audiovisual media, new technologies, video games, social media, blogs and networks.

Thirdly, semi-structured, in-depths interviews were held based on a script. From 29 May to 9 June, work was carried out with the identified targets: advanced users and basic users, in order to be able to reconstruct the details of the discourse. The main focus was on the advanced users, with ten in-depths interviews (seven in Madrid and three in Barcelona), with a comparison group of four in-depths interviews with the basic users. This enabled the emerging learning of advanced users to be distinguished, in order to understand which facts deter their relationships with brands in the new technologies. The sample profile was of men and women aged between 25 and 45 years old, from the middle and upper-middle classes, who had to own more than one technological device, use the Internet daily, shop online, as well as being a habitual and active user of social networks. They had to be people who actively interacted with brands on social networks, looking for information about them or taking part in promotional campaigns, as well as generating their own content to give opinions, take part in forums, talk about their experience with the brand and follow other bloggers.

4. FINDINGS

The wide qualitative research carried out enabled a reconstruction of the reality of the discourse concerning brand communication in the Spanish market. The main lines of discourse on brand communication were identified by the discourse analysis technique (Van Dijk, 1997), also aspects arising from management, structure, systems, processes, agents and emerging trends in the area.

We decided to classify the results from the study into two large groups—the views of professionals and those of users—in order to facilitate understanding.

4.1. The view from media, communication and marketing professionals

A notable finding from the view that Spanish communication experts have is that the discourse on the changes across the communication and media industry is largely redundant. The transformations affect structures, contents,

actors, consumption and return on actions. Therefore, the context of the change is horizontal and defined by six thematic areas:

- 1) *The digital scenario as a driving force in communication change.* For the professional sector, the digital world has changed the contents, as well as how they are shared, which in turn generates new ways of consumption.
- 2) *Content centrality.* A representative group from the experts questioned understood the new content to be a new language that the media and brands used to connect with their target groups, who have been bombarded by advertising to saturation point. In fact, they do not believe that the new types of branded content revolutionise advertising, but are re-workings of the traditional publicity editorials, whose efficacy and profitability are thrown into doubt by the measured results. Thus, the debate is re-opened between the independence of media content and performance. For the experts, advertising content of brands linked to media content means a loss of independence in exchange for ensuring the survival of the media.

Contrary to this view, other more «digital» professionals see the content as the key to a new type of customised communication marked by being creative, instantaneous and innovative –depending on the user, the format, the environment and device. Brands act as content platforms, and even the means, to transfer pertinent content to their customers.

- 3) *New senders: the influencers.* The interest displayed by the professionals toward the individual as a prescriber and influencer is important. This is the most radical change in recent years and alters the role of the media as senders into that of co-creators, together with consumers and users. It is something that also affects advertising and communication agencies by making the model veer toward an unknown sender not connected to the brand's commercial interests.
- 4) *New languages: from storytelling to storydoing, from the story to the experience.* Creating value for brands currently centres on the content and creation of experiences. Storytelling plays a pivotal role in this, as it aims to build a narrative consistent with the brand and in tune with the values promoted. The value has to be linked to a positioning in line with brand behaviour: storytelling to «storydoing». To achieve this connection with the consumer, brands are moving away from links

with corporations and institutions toward emotional, close, credible and human ones.

- 5) *From agenda setting to social agenda.* The media managers thought that agenda setting for the media was starting to be seriously affected by the networks' rules of immediacy and direct communication. The social agenda defined by the public is prevailing over the media's traditional selection criteria.
- 6) *New consumption generating different measurement requirements.* The new devices have given rise to highly fragmented target groups, displayed by multi-platform consumption, making it very difficult for measuring systems, as well as the return on communication actions. While recognising a positive side by opening up greater segmentation of targets, which benefits the brands, it is also understood that measuring results is not easy. Offline and online systems continue to be used and there are no new ways of evaluating and correlating efficiency variables.

4.2. *Advanced users' views on new technologies*

In the light of the analysis of in-depths interviews conducted with advanced users of new technologies and the comparison group of basic users, the key factors currently defining their relationship with brands falls into five large subject areas:

- 1) *Online media as a new space for interaction.* The advanced user is certain that the introduction of new technologies has changed the paradigm of the relationship between brand and customer. In this latest context, traditional media are seen as rather impersonal channels in which it is becoming more difficult to gain visibility. This leads to a lower degree of satisfaction, as they are one-way media whose main function is to create an impact. Moreover, they are thought of as a space where consumers are more willing to relate to brands. In their opinion, brand presence in new technologies is essential, since it provides positive values, such as topicality, modernity, innovation, prestige and validity-existence.
- 2) *False bidirectionality of brands.* Digital users understand that there is still a state of transition from the classic model to a two-way one. They see it as a positive change, as it has generated a great deal of

dynamism in brand communication and uses many more channels; however, they describe the relationship as «false bidirectionality» for three reasons: lack of real interest in dialogue, the use of unsuitable channels, and the loss of content. Despite the positive assessment, users believe that brands could improve and move forward to a win-win situation. Brands and consumers must both take part in transmitting messages, because consumers need to feel that the brands are really listening to them and are committed to taking them into account. Advanced consumers have started to become rather tired of the excessive interest that brands display toward them, and would like to be the ones approaching brands voluntarily.

- 3) *The relationship must be based on experience.* Consumers want their relationship with brands not to be set only at a corporate level, but deem it important for the dialogue to be based on experience. Thus, the interviewees tended to reject and initially distrust what reached them from a strong institutional discourse (values, social responsibility, company news, etc).
- 4) *Adaptability required by channels and communication platforms.* Advanced users relate to brands through multiple online channels and technological platforms, since they are at an advanced stage of responsiveness. However, they are choosy in what they look for from each channel, and so it is important for brands to adapt their way of relating in each device. Brands must focus relationships on the following spheres:
 - *Loyalty and greater visibility* are the key methods of relating, as they help to generate word of mouth (WOM) communication. Consumers accept mass communications with a touch of personalisation in messages containing their name, or including offers, promotions and free gifts not tied to conditions, or when they have asked for the information themselves. Thus, advanced users see e-mail and social networks as the ideal platforms for this type of relationship.
 - Channels aimed at building *brand image and aspirations* are the ones that provide consumers with brand storytelling, usually in the form of entertainment. They offer a discovery, a novelty, a certain amount of excitement, fun or even surprise. Users identify social networks, portals and communities as the best channels for creating a brand image which is also more likely to go viral.

- Channels engaged in *functionality and operability* are where consumers visit the brands to find information, references, comparisons, ease of management, communication, etc. The most popular ones are: mobile-SMS, email, apps and forums. To a certain extent, it is an opportunity for the channels that are lagging behind in communication (SMS and e-mail).
- 5) *Active role as users, but little influence over brands.* Users are aware of their capacity to interact with the brand, but do not believe that this translates into a high degree of influence and power over it. They think that brands «make them feel» that they have power, but are doubtful of their real intention to listen since, for consumer influence to be real, brands would not only have to listen, but also put anything asked of them into practice.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Although the theory tells us that it is rather pretentious to talk of a new communication paradigm, in practice it is not so simple to apply traditional communication models to modern processes and systems.

Using research carried out throughout 2015, we found that communication agents have made substantial progress in becoming aware of their importance. So much so that normally passive users have completely naturally moved toward some kind of relationship with commercial brands. They expect an answer to their questions and requests, they stand up as spokesmen or ambassadors for brands and take an active part in building brand positioning territories. In consequence we can say that brand managers have to reach their objectives in a totally new way.

Dematerialization of brands during the early 21st century has given way to a new embodiment of brand values; a new stage has been reached where live dialogue and active listening is expected in both directions.

Brand management has become a fundamental discipline within the management of intangible assets, highlighting a greater interest in people, beyond consumers and users. In short, the trend leads to strong brands being those that tend to humanise exchange and transactional relationships, and focus on discourse seeking transparency and commitment through the management of their intangible assets.

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