Tales of Seduction and Intrigue: Design as Narrative Agent of Brand Revitalization

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Abstract

We explore the role of design in market performances (Deighton 1992) by examining a case in which a shift in the zeitgeist threatened a flagship packaged good's longstanding brand identity. In this instance, the destabilisation of brand identity and threats to brand equity arose when prevailing *cultural* narratives became significant enough to disrupt existing *brand* narratives. To investigate the impact of the changing cultural narratives, we present a modified brand genealogy, examining the iconic brand's positioning in the cultural context over time and culminating with the strategic response marketers made to ameliorate the unanticipated shift in their product's connotations. In particular, we focus on the role of design as a mechanism for facilitating alternate associations and possible attributions about the brand in the face of semantic crisis. We offer an exploratory framework for the role design can play in re-scripting marketplace narratives and propose a typology of possible outcomes that result in the course of marketers' and consumers' negotiation of their roles in market performance.

Keywords: marketing management; brands; design, market performance; seduction

Contribution:

Our analysis of a company's efforts to pre-emptively revitalise its iconic brand's meaning through design provides three contributions relevant to the marketing, design and consumer culture literatures. We find that brand managers can lever design to mitigate the impact of shifting product interpretations, particularly in times of cultural disruptions. Altering the design of a brand's product, packaging and/or communications can provide consumers with new symbolic resources with which to reinterpret the potentially profaned product's meaning, thus providing alternative readings and attributions of the brand's actions. Second, in emphasising design as a rich source of these symbolic resources, we provide evidence of an alternate role for design within Holt's (2004) cultural branding model, particularly during the 'reinvention' necessary after cultural disruption. Whereas Holt positions design's function as providing a semiotic distillation of the myth performed by the brand, we suggest that, rather than solely serve as an indexical sign of evolving myth markets, (re)design can also provide new material for consumers to employ as 'symbolic salve' (Holt 2004 p. 8) in the midst of narrative schism. Finally, we propose that design can serve varying roles in the construction and production of market performances. Among other outcomes, design elements can provide the catalyst for seduction, providing marketers with a mechanism for invitation and consumers with a means of acceptance.

The success, or otherwise, of an organisation as it attempts to introduce new products or negotiate its way through environmental change can be, in part, attributed to how well it narrates its own story.

(Shankar, Elliott and Goulding 2001, p. 432).

Introduction

One of the longest-lasting slogans in American advertising, for Lay's potato chips, was effective because it rang true, teasing, 'Betcha can't eat just one!' (Hollandsworth 1996). It is, of course, in a company's interest if consumers cannot stop themselves from consuming its product. Yet in 2005, Mars UK replaced its popular 'KingSize Mars' chocolate bar with the 'Mars Duo' in order to suggest the very opposite. A response to growing concerns about an 'obesity epidemic', the Mars Duo consist of two small bars in a single wrapper in the place of the one "King-Sized bar". A spokesman for the company explained: 'Our king-size bars that come in one portion will be changed so they are *shareable* or can be *consumed on more than one occasion*. The name king-size will be phased out. We are a responsible business and are very sensitive to changing consumer needs. This is our contribution to playing a part in trying to help this whole issue of obesity and healthy nutrition' (Fleming 2004; emphasis added). Curiously, rather than simply reducing the size of its large chocolate bar as it had on other occasions, the company opted instead to replace one large bar with two bars of exactly equivalent weight and nutritional value. Whereas the King-size Mars bar weighed 85 grams and contained 386 calories, the Mars Duo consisted of two 42.5g chocolate bars placed inside a single wrapper (*The Grocer* 2005). Combined, these two bars contained exactly the same caloric value as its predecessor (Elliott 2007). In addition, new packaging was introduced to 'enable' the new recommended behaviours: 'innovative snap-pack wrappers, specially designed to snap cleanly in half, giving consumers who can't manage a whole bar in one go the choice to go for the option to save some for later or share with a friend' (*The Grocer* 2005). The design of the new wrappers also offered 'step-by-step picture instructions on how

to open the Duo into two bars' (Elliott 2007)[1].

Mars' somewhat puzzling actions are relevant because brands' design of their products and related promotion provides an important basis for discourse in a co-constructed marketplace (see Giesler 2012). As such, Mars' moves to reframe their large offering without fundamentally changing its composition could be read as calculated rather than concerned. However, we see these actions as evidence of *dramatistic performance*. Dramatistic performance in the market is defined by Deighton (1992) as a situation in which 'performer and audience are each alert to the other's role ... the producer is putting on a show, and the consumer knows it' (Deighton 1992 p. 364). We concur with Deighton's contention that the marketing discipline, 'scripts, produces and directs performance for and with consumers and manages the motives consumers attribute to the decision to perform' (1992, p. 362), but propose that this observation should be extended to include the inextricable role of design in market performance. While marketers might bristle when accused of inducing consumers to engage behaviour in which they might otherwise might not, design's professional narrative has fewer qualms about determining consumers' actions. For example, the concept of affordances relates to the production of forms that permit some uses and discourage others (see Norman 1988).

Extending Deighton's (1992) work on market performance, we ask: 'What role can design play in scripting and producing market performances, particularly in cases where a brand's narrative has been undermined by cultural disruption?' And further, 'What are some of the possible outcomes of marketers' and consumers' differential use of design in the course of negotiating their roles in market performance?

We are particularly interested in cases in which design is used as a mechanism for managing the motives consumers attribute to brand performance. Accordingly, we explore design's role

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[1] We provide an image of this type of wrapper in the Appendix.

in the production of dramatistic market performance by examining a case in which shifts in the zeitgeist—the 'spirit' of a time—threatened a leading consumer packaged good's longstanding brand identity. Our analysis of the company's efforts to pre-emptively revitalise the iconic brand's meaning through design provides three contributions to the marketing, design and consumer culture literatures. First, we find that brand managers can lever design to mitigate the impact of shifting product interpretations in times of cultural disruption. Altering the design of a brand's product, packaging and/or communications can provide consumers with new symbolic resources (Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998) with which to reinterpret the potentially profaned product's meaning, thus providing alternative readings and attributions of the brand's actions. Second, in emphasising design as a rich source of these symbolic resources, we provide evidence of an alternate role for design within Holt's (2004) cultural branding model, particularly during the 'reinvention' necessary after cultural disruption. Holt positions design's function as providing a semiotic distillation of the myth performed by the brand, arguing that, 'over time, as the brand performs its myth, the audience eventually perceives that the myth resides in the brands' markers (e.g. its name, logo and design elements). The brand becomes a symbol, a material embodiment of the myth' (Holt 2004 p. 8). We suggest that, rather than solely serving as an indexical sign of evolving myth markets, (re)design itself can, in addition, provide new material for consumers to use as 'symbolic salve' (ibid.) in the midst of narrative schism. Finally, we propose that design can serve varying roles in the construction and production of market performances. Among other outcomes, design elements can provide the catalyst for seduction, providing marketers with a mechanism for invitation and consumers with a means of acceptance.

Literature Review

Brand image and identity

Keller (1993) has long argued that the key determinant of a brand's equity is

consumers' familiarity with it, as well as the extent to which their associations with the brand are both strong and favourable. This is what de Chernatony (1999, p. 165) would consider *brand image:* 'a holistic impression of the relative position of a brand among its perceived competitors… i.e. customer centred'. She distinguishes this from *brand identity*, 'the ethos, aims and values that present a sense of individuality differentiating the brand, i.e. firm centred' (de Chernatony 1999, p. 165). Theories of the respective role producers and consumers take in determining brand meaning and position have varied over time and across conceptualisation. The perspective that Denegri-Knott, Zwick, and Schroeder (2006) dub the 'consumer sovereignty model' foregrounds consumers' definitions of the brand (e.g. Escalas and Bettman 2005; Fournier 1998, Muniz and O'Guinn 2001), while a more discursive conceptualisation (Denegri-Knott et al. 2006) such as that offered by (for example), Burmann et al (2009); Bergvall (2006) and Kapferer (2004), acknowledges and accounts for countervailing organisational influences in brand semantics:

> *When brand research was in its infancy, analysis tended to focus on the brand image held by the consumer as the precedent of any purchasing decision. This approach neglected the fact that this mental construct is a reflection of something else, i.e. the brand identity designed and communicated to the outside world by signals from the marketer, often intertwined with other signals emanating from different sources (Burmann et al., 2009, p. 114).*

Given our focus on marketing signals—products and packaging—in this analysis, we particularly focus our attention on firms' attempts to communicate a revised brand identity— although we do so having adopted a discursive perspective. Our interest in design stems from its essential role in both brand image and identity. Although the associations surrounding a brand emanate from multiple sources, among the most important are the physical and intangible imagery provided by the brand. Schmitt, Simonson and Marcus (1995) refer to them as 'P-Elements': Products, Presentations, Publications and Properties. These elements serve as symbolic text from which stakeholders draw meaning, allowing them to both infer corporate intention and construct their self-concepts (Escalas and Bettman 2005).

Brand meaning

Symbolism has long been considered a driving aspect of consumption (cf. Levy 1959; Hirshman and Holbrook 1982; McCracken 1986) as well as branding (e.g. Holt 2004). Conejo and Wooliscroft (2015) argue that brands are first and foremost semiotic elements (signs) because they are fundamentally vehicles for expressing meaning. Oswald (2012) reminds us that the value consumers derive from their interpretation and use of brands' meaning is the foundation of brand equity. Meaning drawn from symbols and other signs is dependent upon culturally-contextualised readings and similarly, shifts in the semantic readings of symbols can provoke cultural change (Peterson and Anand 2004). Schroeder (2009) construes brands as 'valuable cultural artifacts and as engaging and deceptive bearers of meaning, reflecting broad societal, cultural, and ideological codes.' He continues, 'Brands are not only mediators of cultural meaning – brands themselves have become ideological referents that shape cultural rituals, economic activities, and social norms. For example, strong brands constantly develop prescriptive models for the way we talk, the way we think, and the way we behave–our goals, thoughts, and desires' (Schroeder 2009, p. 124). Because semantic constructions associated with material artefacts are culturally-specific and liable to change with shifts in hegemonic narratives (Tharp and Scott 1990; Kopytoff 1986), we focus on these objects' authors: brand managers and designers.

Brand Revitalisation

Establishing and maintaining an appropriate brand image and identity is an ongoing project and must be carefully monitored and managed over time, particularly given inevitable "shifts in consumer behaviour, competitive strategies, government regulations and other aspect of the marketing environment" (Keller 1999). Keller's recommendations for brand revitalisation focus on determining if the brand has sources of equity it can renew or if it needs to create new sources of value. According to the author, the latter is favoured when the

brand carries negative associations, as is repositioning the brand for new or lapsed consumers (Keller 1999). Design is often an important mechanism for repositioning brands through material and visual cues. For example, the frozen diet meals brand Lean Cuisine recently repositioned itself away from calorie restriction, a move one analyst described as from "diet to delicious" (Shayon 2015). Communicating the repositioning included both redesigning the product with new recipes as well as packaging featuring images of natural materials and authentic ingredients. Wansink and Huffman (2001) offer insight into the revitalisation of mature packaged good brands, asserting that "brands have been successfully revitalised simply by modifying their brand's size [...], strength [...], ingredients [... or] form (Wansink and Huffman 200,1p. 228-9). We note that each of these involves design. The authors' recommended tactics include associating the brand with relevant goals or new usage occasions and increasing frequency or volume of consumption.

Branding and design

Schmitt et al.'s (1995) 4P-elements, described above, illustrate the interwoven relationship between branding and design, for each component of the marketing mix is designed. Verganti's (2008), description of the role and impact of design highlights its strong similarity to branding. For example, Keller (1993) contends that the two primary roles of a brand are to identify and differentiate, while Verganti (2008), provides the etymology of the word design as 'distinguishing [something] by a sign, giving it significance, designating its relation to other things, owners, [or] users'(p. 440). Similarly, just as Conejo and Wooliscroft (2015) assert that brands are semiotic systems, Verganti (2008) argues that 'designers give meaning to products by using a specific design *language*—that is, the set of signs, symbols and icons (of which style is just an example) that delivers the message' (p. 440, emphasis in original). Finally, like proponents of cultural branding, Verganti notes that in the process of giving products form, function and style, design 'tickles [consumers'] affective and

sociocultural needs' (ibid).

It is perhaps not surprising that most of these brand elements are visual stimuli, for non-verbal, visual brand interactions are powerful sources of associations (Phillips, McQuarrie, Griffin 2014). Schroeder (2004) argues that, 'The image is primary for branding products and services. Products no longer merely reflect images—the image often is created prior to the product, which is then developed to fit the image' (p. 234). A coherent visual brand identity (Phillips et al. 2014) is imperative, not only for creating visual recognition for a brand (i.e. its brand image), but is also an important indicator of identity; these are the 'corporate expressions' that provide fodder for 'customers' impressions' (Simonson and Schmitt 1997). Karjalainen and Snelders (2009) argue that a brand's products convey its core values through visual design language and emphasise the role of *semantic transformation* — the embedding of meaning in objects to be recognised by others (Karjalainen 2004)—as a new offering moves through the phases of its development from strategic idea to a product design. Many forms of design practice (e.g. graphic, retail, industrial and interaction design) impact the communication of brand identity. However, given the specific case we describe next, it is most relevant to focus on the role of packaging in communicating brand meaning.

Packaging design has been described as: 'a silent salesman' (Porter 1999, p. 25); 'the single most influential marketing communications tool' (Wallace 2001, p. 21); an element that has 'the potential to make or break a product' (Bates, in Chaudhuri 2007); a form of 'alchemy' (Hine 1995, p. 77) and, perhaps most simply, the 'emotional aspect' of a brand's form (Blumenthal 2002, p. 15). Packaging can differentiate brands' products from competitors; convey positioning and status; communicate a brand's attributes; express its personality; communicate brand myths and empower consumers (Kniazeva and Belk 2007).

Given the role of design in conveying vital information about the brand, it follows that design is also implicated in brand revitalisation. As noted above, brands can be

revitalised through the redesign of their product attributes such as size and form (Wansink and Huffman 2001). Similarly, Müller, Kocher and Crettaz (2013) have found that logo redesign can play an important role in brand rejuvenation by providing consumers with the sense that the brand is 'current' or modern. Finally, Reimann et al. (2010) have demonstrated the importance of packaging design on consumers' affective and behavioural responses to a product or brand, implying that brand managers should be particularly mindful of the potential impact of packaging changes when seeking brand recovery or revitalisation.

Conceptual Foundation

We employ a narrative lens, viewing the design changes made to the brands' respective identities as a rhetorical act in a discursive marketplace. Sharing Phelan and Rabinowitz's (2012) conceptualisation of narrative as 'a multidimensional purposive communication from a teller to an audience' as well as their interest in 'narrative's affective, ethical and aesthetic effects' (p. 3), we analyse the brand's reframing of its story in terms of its historic and cultural context. Like many of our colleagues, we view brands as culturally-constructed symbols authored by an array of stakeholders (e.g. Preece and Kerrigan 2015; O'Reilly 2005; Schultz and Hatch 2003) and reject the conceptualisation of a one-way communication process in which managerially-constructed brand identities are decoded by consumers into previously determined brand images (Bengtsson and Ostberg 2006).

Given that stories help individuals to structure and make sense of their lives (Shankar, Elliott and Goulding 2001), it is appropriate to take a narrative approach to consumption (e.g. Woodside, Sood and Miller 2008; van Laer, de Ruyter, Visconti and Wetzels 2013) as well as brand management (Chiu, Hsieh and Kuo 2012; Holt 2004; Preece and Kerrigan 2015). In developing a narrative paradigm for consumer research, Shankar, Elliott and Goulding suggest that 'researchers should concentrate on "turning point" moments in peoples' lives' (2001, p. 445). We respond to this recommendation with a twist, focussing instead on turning

point moments in brand histories.

Like many theoretic paradigms, narrative theory is presented in many variations, so we outline two important conceptual assumptions. First, generally speaking, stories have authors and audiences. In some frameworks, finer distinctions—such as between author and narrator as tellers—are important and indeed, a cultural view of branding recognises that brand meanings are 'authored' by a wide variety of sources, including popular culture (Holt 2004; Bengtsson and Ostberg 2006). However, in this paper, we focus on the brand owners' authorship of the brand in the context of prevailing cultural narratives. Second, narratives have two important aspects, 'mimetic' and 'artifactual' (Richardson 2012). The former refers to that which is represented (the events that comprise the narrative) and the latter to the particular manner in which those events are expressed. We emphasise this conceptual distinction because the latter—the manner of expression—is a primary concern of design.

Data, Method and Findings

We present and analyse a case of a prominent brand and packaged food in the UK, the Mars' chocolate bar, a product whose market positioning and equity were eroded by a shift in cultural sensibilities. The result was a flagship product with a long and laudable history at risk of being rendered not only irrelevant, but symbolically noxious. In response, the brand implemented a design-driven intervention. While many brands undergo a periodic cosmetic 'refresh,' the case we analyse is distinctive for four reasons: first, it was once the dominant brand in its category, and still claims high brand equity, recognition and recall. Second, its brand identity and associated messaging were firmly established: until the redesign offering a new narrative, the story of the brand had been remarkably consistent for approximately 70 years. Third, the brand's message and packaging were reconstructed to the point that a consumer might easily interpret the product itself as having changed substantively, although it had not. Finally, and in some ways most interestingly, despite reconstituting the intended

identity and meaning of the product, the brand drew only limited attention to the change in its storyline, primarily through press releases rather than consumer-directed communications (Nadur 2016). For example, there were no graphical bursts on the package proclaiming that anything was 'new or improved' and no advertising campaigns to introduce or highlight the changes.[2] Ultimately, despite facing a potential crisis, the brand's products have maintained their standing, and not only recovered, but grown: Mars bars are still profitably sold in the UK (Marketline 2015).

Data informing our analysis is drawn from multiple sources (see Table 1), including industry histories; media reports; corporate marketing communications (advertising and website texts) and consumer bloggers focusing on the candy industry. Mars, Inc. is a privately held company, renowned for its secrecy (Kaplan 2013). We could not access formal documentation of Mars' competitive strategy in repositioning its flagship product, but we were able gain insight through online and phone interviews with the former executive who was the company's marketing director during the period just before and just after the move to the Mars Duo, as well as the current EVP and Head of Planning for Mars at AMV BBDO London (Mars UK's Agency of Record for the past decade).

Despite our focus on producers' management of the brand narrative, a discursive conceptualisation of the market renders audience reception an important source of information and we sought evidence of consumer responses to the Duo introduction. However, because the product change occurred more than a decade ago, any attempt to retroactively discern consumer reaction is a significant challenge. Nevertheless, we identified two data sources which could provide indicators of consumer sentiment. The first concerns letters to the editor or opinion columns written in response to the announcement that the Mars bar was being changed from King-size to Duo. Despite scouring the text of national

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[2] It is uncommon for a company to leave such changes unheralded. For example, Heinz ran both teaser and introduction campaigns when it introduced its upside-down "easy squeeze" ketchup bottle in 2002 (Kirk 2002).

newspapers from that period (see Table 1 for data sources), we could find only limited examples of this kind, either positive or negative, and we provide examples of some of them below. In addition, we reviewed the text of 22 blogs (see Table 2) focusing on commentary on candy or chocolate (most offered product reviews or displayed wrapper collections). Because bloggers can be considered a type of market maven (Feick and Price 1997), sharing their passion by providing information and critique (Thakur, Summey and John 2013; Ward and Ostrom 2003), we reasoned that they could be classed as consumers most likely to have opinions about any product changes, particularly about such a prominent product—and to voice them. We examined blogs originating in the UK, US and Canada. Although our case takes place in the UK, this is appropriate because the number of UK writers was very small and would not have provided sufficient evidence from which to extrapolate; many of the blogs we examined have an international focus and finally, as noted above, the strategy of replacing large single bars with two of the same size has been adopted by multiple chocolate brands in multiple countries.

We followed the blog text review with emails to each of the blog owners, asking if they recalled the change and, if so, if they would share their reactions. 5 of the 22 bloggers (23%) responded, and we report on their comments in the following section.

Table 1: Data sources for analysis

	Mars Bar
Time period examined	▪ 1932-2005 for brand's account ▪ to present day for consumer recall and response.
Historic context and events	▪ corporate history on website ▪ historic accounts (Hopkins 2012; Cadbury 2010)
brand communications (television and print advertising; press releases)	▪ WARC (World Advertising Research Center) ▪ creativeclub.co.uk/fs.aspx ▪ advertisingarchives.co.uk ▪ http://adsoftheworld.com/ ▪ social media: television adverts on Youtube; Pinterest; ebay ▪ adverts on Mars' corporate website
media coverage news reports, opinion pieces 2000-2010	▪ UK trade publications (*The Grocer* and *Just-Food*); ▪ national news outlets: *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Telegraph*, *The Sun*, *The Daily Mirror* and *BBC*
Market data	▪ MarketLine (Datamonitor)

Consumer response to the redesign	▪ 22 candy and chocolate-focused blogs authored by UK and US-based bloggers; email communications with the bloggers ▪ reader comments in major UK newspapers
Brand strategy	▪ email exchanges with Mars' former Director of Marketing (who served in the role during the period of preparation for the move to Duo format) ▪ phone interview with the EVP and Head of Planning for Mars at AMV BBDO London (Mars UK's AoR for the past decade).
Design strategy	We were unable to locate publicly available information.

Our analysis is based on Holt's (2004) brand genealogy method. This method is appropriate because, as Holt notes, 'tracing the fit between [brand's] text and changes in ... society and culture and by following how these resonances ebb and flow over time...can explain why important cultural products...resonate in the culture at a particular historical culture' (p. 226). Given Mars' relatively abrupt shift in positioning its flagship product, we believe that such a historically and culturally-grounded analysis may help to explain the resulting market discourse. Accordingly, we traced the fit between Mars' marketing and the changing industrial and cultural context by consulting historical texts, newspaper accounts and advertising in both print (e.g. newspaper and magazine advertising available on popular media databases as well as collectors' postings of images on Pinterest and items for sale on eBay) and television (via media databases as well as Youtube) throughout the brand's history from launch, through redesign, to the present. In the case of Mars, we focused on the Mars bar sub-brand only, although other products in the portfolio have received similar Duo portioning and packaging.

Findings: Constructing the chocolate market

It may seem unlikely that the prosaic chocolate bar, consumed as snack or treat, contains a microcosm of ideological values, but in recent years, scholars have begun to unpack the meanings embedded in candy (including chocolate specifically) as a culturally constructed commodity reflecting the 'beliefs, ideas and fears of those individuals who fabricated and consumed [it]' (Dusslier 2001, p. 14). While space limitations do not allow for a proper accounting of the history of the chocolate bar, select details of its early development

are useful in understanding the cultural construction the industry and related brand narratives (Holt 2012).

First, candy was first mass-produced in England in the 1850s, made possible by the Industrial Revolution (Kawash 2013), and early mass consumption of chocolate was in liquid form (as drinking chocolate, the precursor to today's hot chocolate). Second, the first British chocolate factories were more than capitalist endeavours; they were expressions of the Quaker ideals held by manufacturing families such as Cadbury's and Fry's: producing cocoa was both a means to offer honest work to townspeople and to provide a "pure" product which was important in the temperance movement as a substitute for alcohol (Cadbury 2010; Dusslier 2001). Third, initially the consumption of chocolates (often bonbons filled with flavoured creams) was considered the exclusive purview of those of inferior, innocent and delicate sensibilities: the upper-class, particularly women and children (Kawash 2013). However, as the price of sugar declined with increased production (and slavery) in British colonies and manufacturing techniques which separated cocoa butter and liquor progressed, the production of solid chocolate became possible and consumption was more widely adopted, including by men. Interestingly, Dusselier (2001, p. 15) argues that chocolate's design shifted with the gender of its consumer:

> *During the second decade of the twentieth century, the popular press and advertisements directed at men began characterising candy as a valuable fuel rather than a feminine indulgence. Soldiers, sailors and businessmen would discover hidden power and stamina in [...] chocolate. As candy eating became legitimised for men, candy would acquire a new shape. Manly candy bars began to be marketing alongside round, voluptuous bonbons. Who was eating candy transformed not only the meaning attached to this commodity but also its physical properties.*

Thus, despite modern readings of chocolate as treat or indulgence, the cultural construction of the chocolate bar market is rooted in Quaker values of hard work and temperance. As consumption became an acceptable activity for both sexes and both the wealthy and the middle classes, it was accompanied by a growing ambiguity about the propriety of chocolate consumption. Advertising messages for women, still the primary

target, emphasise pleasure, but chocolate consumption by men is framed as providing energy and strength.

The Mars bar: Initial frame: Freshness and Energy

As the confectionary industry grew and developed in England, a parallel industry took root in America. The Curtis Candy Company, Wrigley's, Hershey's and Mars were all founded in the U.S. at the turn of the century. Indeed, the UK's Mars bar had its origins in the US, as it was the first chocolate snack developed by Forrest Mars, son of American company founder Frank Mars (Mars, 2014). As the story goes, Forrest was sent away by his father and moved to the UK In 1932, he introduced the Mars bar, a British version of the American Milky Way bar (Myers 1967). At the time, leading chocolate bars were solid, moulded chocolate (Cadbury 2010) and the Mars bar was an innovation for its rich layers of nougat, caramel and chocolate coating. Advertising[3] from the 1930s focuses on an inventory of stereotypically feminine concerns: purity, niceness, goodness and nourishment. Copy from an advert from 1937 reads, 'a centre made of fresh eggs, malted milk and butter—covered with a coating of delicious creamy milk chocolate made with plenty of milk straight from British dairies...that's Mars' nourishment—and that's Mars' NICENESS. Never was sheer goodness made so *irresistible!'[4]*

With the onset of WWII less than a decade later, daily living supplies, including a variety of foods, were carefully conserved in Britain. Rationing took place from 1940 to 1954 (http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/topics/rationing_in_ww2). Advertising copy for Mars bars during this period frames the chocolate as ideal for all consumers, with the all-purpose strapline: 'Mars are marvellous!' However, in the 1940s in particular, the framing of Mars bars moves from 'nice' to necessary nourishment; each model at the centre of a series of print adverts has a speech balloon asserting: 'There's a meal in Mars'. Mars bars were sent to

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[3] Sample advertising and product images are provided in the Appendix.

[4] fonts italics and capitalisation are presented as shown in the advertisement

British troops and could be purchased by citizens with ration stamps; advertising for the bars repeatedly emphasises three verbs related to the nutritional attributes of the candy: 'milk to *nourish*, glucose to *energise* and chocolate to *sustain*'. Explicit reference to sugar, glucose and calories—all currently vilified by guardians of health—is not only *not* avoided, it is accentuated: one Mars bar advertisement from the 1941 features a table comparing the calories available in 2½d (pence) worth of staple foods (including eggs and beef) with a Mars bar, which easily wins. Despite featuring the image of a female consumer, the copy refers to Mars as 'a man-sized bar of smooth chocolate', underscoring the masculine framing of chocolate as a source of strength and energy.

When rationing was lifted the theme of energy persisted, but this time in terms of enabling productivity in a time of abundance and prosperity. In 1959 the company introduced a slogan that astonishingly, it would retain for almost 40 years: '*A Mars a day helps you work, rest and play.*' The slogan illustrates the company's unequivocal conviction in its product's fat and calorie content as healthy and enabling rather than threatening to health.[5]

If a Mars bar provided energy, surely a larger one would provide even more strength. Citing consumer demand, the company introduced a larger version of its original chocolate snack at least three times. The first was in the early 1950s, as the *Bigger Size Mars*. A trade ad from that period explains that the bars have been enlarged to 'the most that can be given in a chocolate bar for 2 points', reflecting the lingering rationing system. The bars were enlarged again in 1982 (de Chernatony, 1998) and again in 1992 (*The Times* 1992). Existing as a single bar packaged in a wrapper, this latter bar, now called the *King-size Mars* (also known for a time as 'The Big One') was created for 'people whose jobs demanded a lot of energy, such as bricklayers' (de Chernatony, 1998, p.170). The changes were again attributed to market research which showed 'a clear consumer preference for a bigger portion size' and

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[5] In 1991, the Times of London reported that a "health pressure group" complained to watchdog agency the Independent Television Commission that the slogan was false, as there was no way a Mars bar could help a consumer rest, but no action was taken on the complaint. "Move to bar Mars ad." *Times* [London, England] 30 Apr. 1991: 3. *The Times Digital Archive*. Web. 9 July 2016.

promoted with an additional phrase: *Now there's more to Mars,* which, notably, was

introduced and supported with a £2 million advertising campaign (*Times*, 1992). A series of

adverts from this period proclaimed, 'Even more milk. More glucose, more sugar, and more

thick, thick chocolate. In a bar that's bigger than ever before.' The introduction of the king-

size bar is consistent with the readings developed during the early construction of chocolate

meaning. If for women, chocolate bars signified pleasure, a larger bar would presumably

bring more comfort in the early 1990s, as Britain entered its longest recession since the Great

Depression more than half a century earlier. Likewise, if for men chocolate represented

energy and strength, a king-size bar was precisely the fortification a man needed during a

time of economic vulnerability.

The 'Mars a day…' strapline was dropped in 1997 (marketingweek.com) and briefly

replaced by 'Must be Mars,' a 'quirky' new campaign intended to update the bar's meaning

by showing it transforming young men and making them more relaxed (Mcluhan 1998), a

positioning later assumed by sister product Snickers. Despite the new phrasing, a trade article

reporting on the new campaign perpetuates readings of the flagship Mars' brand product as a

source of energy, noting: 'Consisting of 55% pure carbohydrate, the bar is valued as a

concentrated energy source, and stories about of its life-saving properties' (Mcluhan 1998).

Indeed, for the period from 1932 to 2002 the Mars bar product, packaging and

positioning remained relatively unchanged save slight alterations to size, price and the

occasional update of bar nicknames to acknowledge portion size changes. These changes

were so incremental that *Financial Times* journalist Nico Colchester proposed a "Mars bar

index" as a means of monitoring fluctuations in UK prices, reasoning that 'this small ingot of

staple commodities, packaged with great consistency since 1932, is the ultimate unit of

consumer wealth' (Colchester 1981).

Frame bridge: change is in the air

In 2002, a number of changes, though incremental and overdue by most brand and product innovation standards, were set in motion. First, the 70th anniversary of the bar occasioned a refresh of some brand elements. The black, red and gold wrapper remained the same, but the typeface became less formal and 'more contemporary' (BBC 2002), losing its serifs. Marketing communications were the next site to be rejuvenated: the bar's long-time strapline stressing its functional applicability to work, rest andor play was exchanged for the more emotional appeal of 'pleasure you can't measure.' The update, pundits noted, was intended to attract more women. It also acknowledged a steady decline in demand for heavier 'filled' bars like Mars. Some analysts asserted that the new strapline was probably introduced to distract consumers from the fact that the new wrappers would contain bars 2.5 grams smaller at the same price (BBC 2002). Despite the introduction of a number of changes to an otherwise notably steady brand, most consumers during this era would have read the product's form, package design and formulation as updated but entirely consistent with its past. In fact, the introduction of a slightly smaller bar in 2002 was not an indication that the brand was encouraging consumers to consume less chocolate. To the contrary, a UK trade journal reported at the time that the new 'Pleasure' campaign allowed Mars to 'appeal to a more exciting chocolate eater, and a smaller lighter bar could *increase consumption per capita*' (*Just-Food 2002*, emphasis added). In fact, the article quotes Mars' marketing director at the time as saying, 'while people loved the anticipation of biting in the chocolate, they often found that the bar lay rather heavily on their stomach at the end of eating it, which means they wouldn't eat another, sometimes for the rest of the day' (Nadur quoted in *Just-Food 2002*). The following year, sales grew by 20% (Datamonitor 2004).

Frame shift: readings of gluttony, immorality and pathology

Invented at a time of relative scarcity, and soon valued for the provision of necessary calories during wartime, display adverts for the Mars bar once had boasted, 'there's a meal in

Mars'. But by 2004, the notion that a single Mars bar contained the same number of calories as a single meal was troublesome. In the last two decades, the availability of low cost food (Pollan, 2003; Akst, 2003) and the subsequent ability for food manufacturers and commercial food outlets to increase portion size (Young and Nestle, 2002) to justify incremental price increases, together have contributed to an increased incidence of obesity. Contemporary narratives frame obesity as a disease plaguing humanity, with writers of health policy and academic literature as well as the journalistic press tending to use alarmist language, increasingly framing its prevalence as an "epidemic" Boero (2007). This is a significant interpretive shift, since for the majority of human history, hunger has been more of a pressing issue than corpulence, and so until recently, hegemonic narratives framed the existence of body fat as the sign of a well-functioning civilisation. The anxiety over excessive body fat is relatively new. Concerned narratives about body fat began to emerge in the post-World War II era of prosperity, when obesity began to be seen as a 'sign of weakness or moral lassitude' (Boero, 2007, p. 45). Today, the construction of obesity as a moral issue is prevalent in the West (Boero, 2007; Inthorn and Boyce, 2010). This can be seen in the narratives emanating from mainstream politics which, as a source of social organisation and authority, are indicators of prevailing discourses. In 2008, David Cameron, then Leader of The Opposition, was explicit in his moral appraisal on the issue: 'We talk about people being "at risk of obesity" instead of talking about people who eat too much and take too little exercise […]' he declared, leaping quickly to predict collective downfall if allow the situation to continue. 'There is a danger of becoming quite literally a de-moralised society, where nobody will tell the truth anymore about what is good and bad, right and wrong' (Cameron cited in Porter, 2008).

In the spring of 2004, an influential cross-party committee of politicians cited foods which were both 'calorie-packed' and sold in 'super-size portions' as contributing to rising

obesity rates, and urged the government to 'publicly name and shame' companies choosing not to act on its findings (Hickman, 2006). Certain categories were singled out as particularly virulent causes of obesity. Among those most vilified were fast food (the documentary *Super Size Me*, an indictment of McDonalds meals, had been released in 2004) and candy. Negative attention began to focus on the portion sizes and caloric values of king-size chocolate bars.

As fast food and candy were determined to be implicated in the 'obesity epidemic', a new series of negative associations were immediately attached to the food groups. As exemplified by Cameron's comment above, these included gluttony (Prentice and Jebb 1995); selfishness (Cafaro 2005); and immorality, for indulging in practices now linked to obesity transferred a sense of imminent harm to both the perpetrator and society at large. These new narratives meant that consumption of a king-size Mars bar, once framed as source of energy and productivity, could now be interpreted as evidence of depravity. Trade journal just-food, reporting on excessive annual chocolate consumption by the British ('nearly twice the European average') explaining the excess with an unfortunate comparison: '10kg…or the equivalent of 154 Mars bars' (2004).

The moralistic turn threw the Mars brand into semantic crisis. And, while its competitors were similarly tainted, Mars' brand essence had revolved around the bars' generous proportions and abundance of sugar. It did not help that in 1995, a fish and chip shop in Scotland had invented a 'deep fried Mars bar', an action which created an infamous regional specialty but also placed the brand squarely at the centre of negative stereotypes about unhealthy diets (Knight 2016). For a company that had once emphasised its flagship product's caloric content with pride, these revised readings of its chocolate bars were toxic.

Ironically, just months before the denouncements by politicians, the company had launched a line extension aimed at women called the 'Mars Delight' which, while promoted as having a light, delicate texture, was also the most fattening bar in the company's history

(Wright 2004). As concerns over obesity mounted, any existing strategic brand portfolio plans were effectively terminated. Mars was in need of a 'semantic transformation' (Karjalainen and Snelders 2009).

Telling new stories: readings of sharing and moderation

By autumn of 2004, the Food and Drink Federation (FDF), a UK trade association, made a series of pledges that it claimed would address root causes of obesity, such as removal of vending machines from elementary schools (BBC 2004). The FDF's pivot was as shrewd as the politicians who had precipitated it, as it proposed how its member companies (which included Mars) should reframe their offerings: 'If, for example, we mark up a product for sharing, and that is backed by a general understanding that perhaps two products in one day is more than moderate, then we are starting to get somewhere' (Patterson in BBC, 2004).

Given this explicit prompt, it is not surprising that by 2005, the King-size Mars bar was discontinued, replaced by two bars inside a single wrapper and renamed the Mars Duo. As noted earlier, combined, the two bars contained the same number of calories as the king-size bar they had replaced. The Mars duo also weighed the same as its predecessor. . Given the now ubiquitous obesity narratives creating negative associations for rich chocolate bars, Mars next pledged to discontinue all chocolate items in its portfolio containing more than 250 calories per portion by 2014 (Reilly, 2012). In the revised narrative, the pledge not only both absolved the Mars Duo from blame, but also from compliance with its self-regulation, because Mars determined that the Duo bars' 'design for sharing' exempted them from meeting the terms of the pledge, despite the fact that a (total) 386-calorie confection was still on the market (Reilly 2012). Thus, with little fanfare, destructive associations of selfishness and gluttony were swiftly supplanted by a narrative emphasising sharing. Sharing is culturally framed as being intrinsically connected with moderation (Cafaro, 2005) as well as laudable behaviours such as altruism, sociality and solidarity (Belk 2010).

Design Activity: provision of plausible deniability

Converting the product semantics (Krippendorff 1989) of Mar's large offering from associations of harm to altruism required multiple forms of design. Although it may appear mundane, the development of packaged foods such as chocolate bars is a high profile activity for which major design and innovation consultancies are regularly engaged (Seymourpowell 2013). In the Mars case, redesign was required of the bars themselves (product design); the wrapper that divided at the middle to expose two portions (packaging design) and related marketing collateral (communication design). The redesign was critical to the communication of a new narrative for Mars' new large offering: it was no longer an object of selfish indulgence, but of collective participation and care, a semantic shift enabled by design.

'King-sizing' chocolate bars initially enabled candy makers to realise record profits, (Wilner 1997). By 2004, however, changing ideologies and related narratives about obesity and illness, explicitly linked to the chocolate confections sector by politicians, fatally disrupted producers' extant positioning as well as planned strategies. The chocolate confectionary market has experienced significant volatility in the UK since the Mars Duo was introduced. Ingredient prices have contributed to the instability, but so have continued concerns with connection between confectionary and obesity. Interestingly, while the industry has experienced much slower growth than prior to 2004, overall consumption has continued to increase (Canadean 2015).

Design as a mechanism to fulfil or fool?

Brands exist within cultural systems, and therefore changes in these systems can precipitate a loss of equity and lead to strategic modifications. Indeed, given the importance of overarching cultural discourse to the fate of brands, it stands to reason that marketers, compelled to update their brands' positioning, would select from among the dominant discourses surrounding its target market even when they are partially at odds with established

brand narratives. Yet this very logical conclusion obscures two unresolved irregularities that linger in spite of Mars' impressive narrative pivot: why did Mars approach its replacement of the King-size in such a circumspect way? And why have consumers seemingly capitulated?

Scrutiny of the performance mounted by Mars' marketers in response to the brand's semantic crisis is warranted, i.e. what might be made of the relatively banal packaging redesigns presented by the brand within the context of a serious predicament? Recall that at the time of the FDF's reports on an obesity epidemic, Mars was in the midst of launching a line extension, the Delight, intended to stimulate demand. It had already invested in a 'multimillion pound advertising campaign' positioning the bar as an 'indulgent treat' in Ireland and was now in the untenable situation of launching the most caloric chocolate bar in its history into the English market (Wright 2004) at the very moment when the political atmosphere had soured for any product considered to be contributing to a public health crisis. And yet, into this roiling marketplace, Mars brought a counterintuitively unobtrusive redesign marked by incrementalism (see image in Appendix). Not only was the bar's form only minimally adjusted (from one to two pieces), its introduction was unusually reserved: 'no communication accompanied it' (Nadur 2016). After all, the 1992 *increase* in size had been accompanied by a new slogan ('Now there's more to Mars')*,* supported with an advertising campaign. If the Duo was believed to be an unequivocal design solution, why would Mars not herald its arrival?

Given a discursive marketplace, it is also necessary to examine the response to the Mars Duo by its audience. There are two key audiences for this performance, marketplace observers (the media) and marketplace participants (consumers), and in both we find tacit acceptance of the brand's new sharing narrative. It would be reasonable to expect that a redesign marked by messages of moderation and restraint in the wake of copious negative media coverage blaming Mars for inciting gluttony would engender distrust in consumers

(including reporters) with a basic knowledge of marketers' persuasion tactics (Friestad and Wright 1994). Yet while scepticism is voiced in some news reports—most critically from the *Times'* consumer reporter (Elliott 2007)—there is surprisingly little evidence of resistance to the brand's manoeuvres.

Puzzled by the relative lack of debate, we considered a possible explanation: Mars consumers simply are not easily politicised. Accordingly, we conducted online searches and easily found several examples of consumer activism directed at the company. For example, a move by Mars to switch to non-vegetarian whey in the production of some of its bars met with a reported 6,000 complaints and the signatures of 40 members of parliament on a motion against the move, forcing the company to reverse its decision (Cooper 2007). Over the years numerous consumer organisations have organised protests against Mars for its animal testing, and most recently, the company faced threats of boycott from UK football fans in Wales because brand advertising tied to the Euro Cup 2016 championship was limited to support for the English team (Turner 2016). We therefore conclude that the lack of debate on the Mars Duo is not connected to the existence of a de-politicised consumer base.

We *did* find emotionally-charged consumer reaction to news reports about Mars' modifications to its flagship product's size format, but in 2012 and not related to the Duo format. In this case, consumers voiced resentment over Mars' decision to reduce its chocolate bar sizes to comply with its self-imposed 250-calorie cap on 'regular' size bars. The consumer outrage we observed was not in response to a smaller bar *per se*, but rather concern that price of smaller bars would not be adjusted accordingly. In fact in one case, an article about the forthcoming smaller chocolate bars we analysed garnered 209 consumer comments, yet only 19 of these were a direct response to Mars' decision to support consumers' health by manufacturing lower-calorie bars (Reilly 2012, *online comments*). Interestingly, the 2012 announcement of smaller, 250-calorie bars, provoked some consumer derision over the

company's attempt to control their agency. Most of the comments of this kind were variations on this consumer's rebuke of Mars' format change: 'Why all the bother of downsizing? All some people will do is eat two instead'! (ibid)

In general, we found benign indifference on the part of consumers to the move to the Mars bar Duo, even from those whose engagement in the confectionary industry as bloggers would make them more like to monitor and respond to activities like the Duo introduction. For example, none of the blog authors wrote about the format change in terms of Mars' intentions, actions, or even implications for public health. In fact, while trends such as the introduction of two-bar formats (also adopted by Mars' competitors) may have increased their awareness, the bloggers in our sample who referred to portion size generally did so in the context of a product review, rather than commentary on industry or social changes. For instance, the author of *Chocablog* declared Heroes, a mixed variety package of miniature Cadbury bars, 'perfect for *not*-sharing around Christmas time'[6]

Asked directly about their memories and reactions to the discontinuation of the king-size bar format, the bloggers who responded acknowledged awareness but no particular concern about the change. *Candy Critic* replied:

> I don't particularly remember when Mars eliminated the king-size bar, but it was around the time that portion control was becoming a bit of a trend. From what I could see, the portion control trend came about to answer two different issues:... portion control diets started to become a fad, and [...] regulation from governments. ... As for if I like these new "snack sized" treats, generally I do. For the portion control reasons it's a great way to enjoy your favourite treat without losing any quality...As a guy who samples candy for a living this can be a really great thing.

Similarly, *Candy Guru* remains unperturbed despite acknowledging the 'marketing angle' motivating the format change:

> I'm actually guilty myself of not remembering when this change happened, but it seems kind of obvious to me that it's a marketing angle geared at looking more healthy, or rather, less gluttonous. They win, because instead of calling something "king-sized" they call it "sharing size" which implies that two or more people are eating it, not just one lonely loser in his 40's sitting in front of his computer. Definitely not speaking from personal experience there. No sir.
>
> On the flip side…Stateside, there's been another trend that might appear to be in line with this: unwrapped candies in re-sealable bags… I'm positive these too are geared at "sharing", but I'm also

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[6] (http://www.chocablog.com/reviews/cadbury-heroes/emphasis added).

positive they're having the opposite effect. I highly doubt anyone is pulling this out of the pantry, taking 4 small pieces out and calling it a night.

In fact, the most direct comment in our data (excluding industry blogs) was a review of the Snickers 3x by *CandyBlog.net.* Beginning the review, she notes wryly:

They only come in the 2ToGo size, which is like a king-size bar, except there are two small bars in the package. The wrapper says that you can eat one now, twist the wrapper and save the other for later. Yeah, as if a lot of people do that. *(Mars is phasing out their king size bars over concerns about portioning and will only sell bars with 250 or fewer calories). [12 May 2012, emphasis added.]*

As marketplace observers, the media's response was also notable, but for its pervasively playful, even cheeky, tone of reporting on the format switch. For example, one *Independent* commentator wrote,

Apparently, the defence for the Mars Duo and other freaks is that "they are made for sharing". But when was the last time anyone asked you, "Would you like half of my Mars Duo because if I eat it all myself, I'm going to be sick?" People do not purchase confectionery by committee. I can just about imagine someone buying a Mars Duo, thinking, "I'll give the other half to X when I get back home."...but as to whether that other half would still be in their pocket, as opposed to their stomach, by the time they stepped through the front door...that is another matter entirely (Martin 2012).

Elsewhere in the article, the author asserts that contemporary portions generally are too large and argues that cutting the Mars bar in half will not arrest the trend. Yet despite opining that the new format is fatally flawed and will not arrest consumption, the author never criticises Mars or expresses indignation.

Likewise, a snarky essay in the *Daily Telegraph* about the 'Pleasure you can't measure' campaign reported on a Southampton man who, when learning of the imminent recipe change, bought 150 eight-packs of the regular bars for freezer storage and 200 individual bars 'for immediate use'. Explaining that the Delight bar involves the Mars shifting its focus from 'hearty feeds' to 'light pleasurable snacks,' the reporter confides:

Personally, I welcome the news. There is something disgusting about a hearty feed between meals. I always preferred the more pansy Milky Way.[…]Whenever I have succumbed to the temptation of a Mars bar, I have come away feeling at least two stone heavier, and my mouth has had an odd gooey texture for 24 hours, making it virtually impossible to work, rest or play. On the other hand, the slogan 'A Mars a day helps you grow fat, feel awful and get spots' wouldn't have had quite the same ring. (Brown 2002).

The tone of such accounts is odd in that it is at once damning (the chocolate makes him too sick to carry on) and jaunty. Reports of similar tone appeared in *The Guardian*

(Holmes-Watkins 2002) and the *BBC*'s 'R.I.P.' feature. In the latter, readers were encouraged to offer tributes to the King-size bar, one of which was 'Fairwell [*sic*]. We'll (work, rest and) pray for you' (BBC 2004). One possible reading of this black humour is that it reflects an underlying ambivalence about the Mars bar (and candy in general), as something both alluring and repellent. Humour is well known as a means to discharge tension (Raskin 2008).

Despite a fear- and anxiety-laden obesity narrative dominating media accounts for several years which precipitated the demise of the KingSize Mars, there is little to indicate any result of foregrounding of health-related issues in the public discourse, nor can the bar's redesign on actual consumer behaviour be directly measured. It *is* known that the brand experienced an extended lift in sales following the redesign (an increase unlikely to be explained by the temporary renewal of attention to otherwise forgotten products), and the Mars' Duo offering continues to sell well (MarketLine 2015)[7]. So while it is possible that the increase in sales volume is explained by an increased propensity of consumers to share chocolates, the figures suggest instead that consumers have not fully internalised the marketer-scripted consumption scenarios which encourage moderation. The current Mars UK CEO Fiona Dawson is confident that the public is able to consume responsibly; she was recently quoted as insisting, 'we would in no way, ever, ever, want a Mars bar to be a healthy option. It is a treat…People get that' (*Financial Times* 2016), but the continued growth in obesity rates in the UK (Sedghi 2014) suggests that even if consumers are intellectually aware of the need to limit some foods in their diet to achieve better health, they have not necessarily linked awareness to behaviour.

Discussion

It has been said that the Mars bar 'defies the laws of marketing' (Watt 1992) because despite the constant jockeying for market share and pressure to innovate that characterises the

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[7] In 2014, Mars held a 26.1% share of the UK market, second only to Mondelez (Cadbury's parent company).

consumer packaged goods industry, the Mars chocolate bar has retained deep awareness, maintained strong performance and fostered emotional resonance for almost 85 years, all without changing the essential nature of its brand elements or promise. Despite its American lineage, the Mars bar is an enduring fixture of life in Britain (Alexander 2005). In both its status as a parent brand and as an individual product, Mars has maintained its fundamental identity as a means to *reward and restore* (Miller 2016) in ways that have transcended time and trend. The dependability and consistency of this message is well summarised by an executive at J. Walter Thompson who described the bars' long-lasting value proposition as: '*the energy to get you through what you have to do and on to what you want*. What *did* change was what we aspired to do and be' (Alexander 2005, emphasis added).

According to Holt (2004), iconic brands derive their value from how well they respond to tensions in the national culture, and when there are tumultuous cultural shifts, the brand can lose momentum. Mars ran headlong into one such cultural disruption in the early 2000s, as prevailing discourses about health and wellness took a sharp turn. Whereas the Mars bar had once been a source of enjoyment and sustenance for soldiers posted abroad, as well as civilians living under austerity measures, at the turn of the 21st century consumers essentially became victims of their own prosperity and abundance. The rise of knowledge work as an economic engine and its enabling technologies have given rise to a growing population of sedentary consumers— and inactivity affects consumers of all ages, not just office workers. In this context, a Mars bar a day for work, rest, and play is a potential compromise to consumer health.

As detailed above, for most of the history of the brand, any concerns related to the Mars bar were generally considered reparable through minor adjustments to the bar's volume and texture. Over time the bar has been subject to more size revisions than Alice in Wonderland, and the bar's nougat and caramel fillings periodically are made softer, fluffier,

creamier or chewier to solve a perceived shortcoming (e.g. Times 1992). By the end of the

1990s, however, declining sales meant that consideration of a line extension had to be

seriously contemplated. The result was the fat- and sugar-reduced Mars 'Light', launched in

1997. It did not succeed. Referring to the Light, an industry analyst commented that 'They

taste awful and don't sell. People know chocolate is bad for them but they eat it for the taste.

They do not appear to be interested in products that are less bad' (Jago in Wright 2004).

Mars' response was to try the other end of the spectrum, introducing the very fluffy—and

caloric—Mars 'Delight'. It too was a failed experiment, a consequence at least partially

attributable to the increased prevalence of the 'obesity epidemic' narrative at the time.

Indeed, referring to the Mars Delight, the chairman of the Commons Heath Select Committee

complained: 'Mars appears to be thumbing its nose at Britain's obesity crisis' (Wright 2004).

It is at this critical juncture in Mars' history that the Duo replaces the King Size Mars bar.

Dramatistic Performance and Seduction

In reconstructing the brand's historic and semantic path to this point, we are setting

the stage, for the replacement of the KingSize Mars bar with the Duo is a dramatistic

performance. As Deighton (1992) specifies, in dramatistic performance, the performer and

audience are each alert to the other's role. Given the evidence presented on the preceding

pages, it can be inferred that consumers would see Mars' retirement of the King-Size as a

response to emerging hegemonic narratives vilifying the consumption of fast food and candy.

Similarly, we can be confident that to determine an optimal format to replace the King Size

bar, the marketers and designers at Mars would have considered options believed to be

acceptable to their consumers. Given that one of the criteria for the new offering was, by

definition, resolving the 'design flaw' that occasioned the King Size bar's retirement, it is

equally reasonable to speculate that at a minimum, one requirement of any replacement

would be to evade semantic readings of gluttony. Ostensibly, this leaves Mars with limited

options: 1.) reduce the *size* of the single unit bar to a minimum acceptable threshold of offending nutritional values (e.g. calories); 2.) change the Mars bar *recipe* to conform to acceptable nutritional values (e.g. by using artificial sweeteners) or 3.) maintain the chocolate bar's recipe but modify the bar's *affordances*—the material characteristics of an object that determine or suggest what actions are possible to take with it (Gibson 1977; Norman 1988)—in this case, either signaling appropriate portioning or discouraging excessive consumption.

The relatively limited amount of time in which Mars had to launch the replacement offering (due to the government's threats of regulation) renders selection of option #2 unlikely; the brand had recently, and unsuccessfully, attempted this very strategy with the *Mars Light* bar and would have had to start again to find a new formula. Selecting option #1 is a possibility, but it is likely to result in a loss of revenue unless the new, smaller bar is sold at the current King Size bar's price. This plan would probably have provoked the same resentment that resulted in 2012 when the company tried the strategy. At this point, the most sensible and logical choice is option #3. This much is straightforward.

The unknown variable, however, is consumers' response to an offering which has only technically met the nutritional standard but is essentially identical to the current (and recently abandoned) form. Here is where performance (Deighton1992) becomes inextricably linked to seduction (Deighton and Grayson 1995). 'Marketing seduction enrols its consumers by casting them in desired roles and inviting them to play along…enrolment in a performance is more than the changing of beliefs … it draws the consumer, even if only for a while, into an integrated web of beliefs, values, aspirations, scripts and conduct' (ibid.: 671-2).

Given the details of Mars' King Size—Duo swap, we expected to see, if not moral outrage, then at least ample instances of the kind of cynicism expressed by this activist: 'I know the manufacturers say eat one and save [the other] for later, well I'm sorry, but you just never see children doing that' (Elliott, 2007). The article in which the consumer is quoted

includes the expert opinion of an obesity researcher who flatly rejects industry claims that consumers will save the chocolate for later: 'Once the wrapping is open, the bar is eaten' (Jebb in Elliott 2007). Yet despite combing newspaper articles and industry news, we found relatively little indignation.

The paucity of negative reaction led us to consider the possibility that some consumers, despite intellectually rejecting dubious sharing claims, might actually *benefit* from temporary acceptance of the sharing premise. And indeed, this is how seduction functions. Deighton and Grayson (1995) explain that 'the paradox of seduction is that it induces consumers to enjoy things they did not intend to enjoy…because the market entices the consumer to abandon set of social agreements and collaborate in forging of another, often incompatible, set of agreements that then serve to govern the relationship, its value and the satisfactions that it can yield' (p. 660).

The role of materiality in the Mars instance—two chocolate bars in place of one; a wrapper that snap in half—lead us to reflect upon the function of design, not only as its role is conventionally narrated, as an initial agent of excitement or enticement, but perhaps even more importantly, as a source of signals reinforcing positive attributions. For example, hearing that the Mars Duo is for sharing or saving might activate a consumer's persuasion knowledge and coping behaviours (Friestad and Wright 1994), leading him or her to doubt the brand's intentions. In this example, however, the packaging design might provide an immediate counterargument: if the chocolate was not going to be shared, why would Mars have designed packaging that facilitated sharing? Alternately, the existence of two bars instead of one might endow the consumer with a sense of perceived control and activate an optimism bias, allowing him or her to believe that they will be able to eat one of the bars and save or share the other. In both of these scenarios, the consumer's interpretation is facilitated by design cues that, if attended to, can serve as symbolic resources.

We intentionally employ the term *resource*, because we do not assume that the consumer will necessarily perceive the design elements let alone interpret them in ways that enrol him or her in the performance. As Deighton and Grayson define seduction, the consumer must enter a new social consensus, one which integrates what the marketer wants, what the consumer wants and what the institutionalised reality will allow (Deighton and Grayson 1995, p. 662). In this scenario, we presume that the marketer wants the consumer to purchase the chocolate and the consumer *wants* to buy and eat the chocolate. For seduction to take place and be sustained, there must an institutionalised element in which even if one consumer rejects the 'sharing' claim, there is a broader consensus among enough other marketplace actors that sustains the claim's credibility. We propose that in the Mars Duo case, design elements function as a mechanism providing this credibility. In other words, a consumer purchasing a king-sized chocolate bar who tells his or her friend that they are buying a large bar so that there will be enough should anyone ask for some of it, will likely be disbelieved, and have her claim rejected. However, if the friend asks why the consumer is buying such a large portion of chocolate and the consumer shows the friend a package that has two pieces;, and is printed with text reading 'share or save', the consumer has credible evidence to present to her friend: this is an example of what Deighton and Grayson characterise as a 'social interaction whose goal is a working consensus, useful rather than truthful' (p.661).

Of course, another consumer can encounter the chocolate bar without engaging in any awareness of these design elements. The consumer can simply recognise Duo as the bar's name and the two pieces as its format[8] without any further cognitive elaboration. In this way, the design elements are ambiguous; both interpretations are possible. Design is by definition symbolic, but when those symbols are used in the service of seduction, its invitation should

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[8] for example, the Mars Bounty bar (like the American Mounds) has always been sold as two pieces in a single package.

be *implicit*, the visual version of asking someone to 'come up and see my etchings'. If there is

no seduction necessary, there is no need to enrol in a new consensus, as the existing

paradigms are upheld. Similarly, seduction in marketing requires consumers to participate in

the relationship by accepting new roles or narratives. When marketers present consumers

with an alternate narrative and consumers have not agreed to participate in the performance,

the result is deception, not seduction. In these examples, the conditions that change are the

degree to which the consumer is interested in participating in the performance. In both

instances, the marketer's invitation is implicit. However, seduction is not always marketers'

objective, and if there is no benefit to fostering ambiguity they may construct performances

in more explicit terms. In Table 3 below, we present an exploratory framework that considers

the role design can play in re-scripting marketplace narratives under alternate conditions

(implicit/explicit use of design and high/low consumer participation in the performance), and

propose a typology of outcomes. In addition to seduction, a case in which the marketer's use

of design is implicit and the degree of consumer participation is high, we theorise the role of

design in three other outcomes: deception, introduction and revitalisation.

Deception (marketer's role implicit; consumer's participation low)

Our use of the term deception is conceptually similar to the concept of stealth

marketing: 'a deliberate act of entering, operating in, or exiting a market in a furtive,

secretive or imperceptible manner, or an attempt to do so' (Roy and Chattopadhyay 2010, p.

71). In this condition, a package might be redesigned to obscure the provision of a smaller

amount of product. The consumer is unaware of the change and continues to use the

product's design as a means of recognition.

Introduction (marketer's role explicit; consumer's participation high)

Introduction is the conventional strategy used to introduce a new brand or product. As

product design has become increasingly recognised as an important tool in firms' creation of

value (Luchs and Swan 2011), brands across industries deploy this strategy to garner

attention and interest in their innovation. For example, when Tide laundry detergent Pods

were introduced in 2012, marketing communications hailed them as a redesign of the laundry

task itself (www.pg.com). Consumers with high involvement in the category may have been

eager to accept this narrative and test the new product.

Table 3: Exploratory framework for the role design can play in re-scripting marketplace narratives

		Changes in product and/or brand	
		Marketer's use of design to re-script brand or product narrative: **Implicit**	Marketer's use of design to re-script brand or product narrative: **Explicit**
Degree of consumer participation in producers' performance	High	**Seduction** • *Marketer's use of design:* provide symbolic resources for the willing suspension of disbelief **e.g.** Mars' introduction of the Duo with 'sharing' packaging and messaging • *Consumer's use of design:* signals of plausible use **e.g.** Can consume the product under revised design narrative (i.e. share or save the Duo) or can consume entire package as single serving.	**Introduction** • *Marketer's use of design:* provision of evidence of differentiation and/or innovation **e.g.** New product forms, such as Tide detergent pods • *Consumer's use of design:* recognise new consumption opportunities; build or refine market knowledge and skills. **e.g.** experiment with new brands or products based on attraction
	Low	**Deception** • *Marketer's use of design:* providing false signals to trick or hide **e.g.** Designing a jar with a thicker base so that it appears to be the same size but holds less product • *Consumer's use of design:* (naïve) identification of desired brand or product. **e.g.** consumer sees familiar product on a shelf and places in his cart.	**Revitalisation** • *Marketer's use of design:* signal relevance; reinforce/establish brand associations **e.g.** Microsoft Surface • *Consumer's use of design:* justification for sustaining an otherwise low involvement relationship **e.g.** purchase of Hellmann's mayonnaise for new easy dispensing squeeze bottle

Revitalisation (marketer's role explicit; consumer's participation low)

Design is used in many ways to communicate changes to brands or products. Product

design can be used to establish or revitalise associations about a brand; the launch of

Microsoft's Surface tablet provided an opportunity for marketers to highlight (or establish, depending on the consumer) the brand's aesthetic and functional sophistication, hoping to draw consumers in and up the participation continuum (to Introduction). For consumers who have little or declining interest in a brand or product, novel design elements can sustain an otherwise passive relationship, for example, by reminding consumers of the product or providing a new value proposition.

While exploratory, this framework provides provocation for the continued investigation of design's importance beyond the determination of form and function. It suggests that: 1.) design is integral to market performance; 2.) design can play a range of roles shifting market discourse, including initiating, sustaining, disrupting or violating extant narratives and 3.) for any brand or product redesign, it is important to consider the distinct uses of design elements by marketers and consumers.

Conclusion and Contributions

Friestad and Wright (1994) argue that consumers develop an ability to 'recognize, analyse, interpret, evaluate, and remember persuasion attempts and to select and execute coping tactics believed to be effective and appropriate' (p. 3). Our findings suggest that in cases of goods that contradict hegemonic cultural discourses, consumers' coping tactics may actually involve complicity with the marketers of whom they are normally wary.

Our examination of a case in which marketers were compelled to redefine their brands' identity in the face of shifting cultural narratives makes a number of contributions relevant to the marketing and design literatures. We extend previous work on marketplace interactions between producers and consumers (e.g. Chronis 2008 JMM). Specifically, in the context of cultural brand theory, we argue that marketers' gambits need not be exclusively interpreted as unwanted intrusion in consumers' otherwise harmonious existence, nor should

they be necessarily considered unbiased consumer advocates. Rather, we provide evidence that brands may use design to provide useful symbolic resources for individuals to employ as a means of reconciling their ambivalence towards specific consumption occasions.

Highlighting design's role as a communicator of these symbolic resources, we provide evidence of an alternate role for design within Holt's (2004) cultural branding model, particularly during the 'reinvention' necessary after cultural disruption. In addition to aiding in brand heuristics, design can serve an active role in building and sustaining cultural brands. Finally, we propose that design can serve varying roles in the construction and production of market performances. Our finding that design elements can both serve as a catalyst for and enable its performance extends the limited literature on market seduction.

Limitations of our research include the focus on a single case study and, in particular, some unusual elements of the focal company, such as the fact that the company we studied is a private, family-owned entity famous for its privacy. Studying a publicly held company would enable examination of strategic documentation and outcomes. In addition, the length of time that had passed since some of the critical actions in the case took place, made it difficult to locate source marketing communications material and influenced the number of consumers who could be consulted and the accuracy of their recall. Future studies might employ a multiple case method to allow patterns to emerge and be compared across cases.

Other promising avenues for further research include investigating the qualities and boundary conditions for the brand elements that are deployed in the course of seductive performance. Anecdotally, it would seem that these symbolic elements must be sufficiently apparent and valuable that consumers made uncomfortable by prospective product use easily leverage them to neutralise toxic associations. At the same time, they must be benign enough that any favourable imagery held by the brand is preserved, because a radical redesign might disrupt brand equity tied to historic associations.

Finally, future studies might investigate service, celebrity or national brands, among others, in the wake of cultural disruption to examine the role of design elements in ameliorating semantic crisis within very different contexts and conditions.

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