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2021

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Recommended Citation

Erevelles, Sunil; Hoffmann, Emily; and Bulusu, Maanasi, "Brand Wonder" (2021). *Association of Marketing Theory and Practice Proceedings 2021*. 16.

https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/amtp-proceedings_2021/16

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ABSTRACT

Affect is a core construct in the understanding of how consumers respond to marketing stimuli, such as brands, products and communications, and is critical in the achievement of marketing outcomes (Erevelles 1998). Despite an extensive body of literature on affect in marketing that exists today, there appears to be an incomprehensible gap in the literature on the study of one type of emotion. This emotion has been described as “*humanity’s most important emotion,*” and the “*one emotion (that) inspired our greatest achievements in science, art and religion*” (c.f., Prinz 2013, p1). That emotion is wonder. Adam Smith, often known as the father of capitalism, describes wonder as arising “*when something quite new and singular is presented ... (and) memory cannot, from all its stores, cast up any image that nearly resembles this strange appearance,*” resulting in “*suspension of the breath*” and “*swelling of the heart.*” (c.f., Prinz 2013, p1). The motivation of this paper lies in the need to fill the aforementioned gap, by better understanding wonder, and how it could transform branding in the future. The value proposition for wonder in branding appears to be clear: greater sensory engagement, associated with awe, astonishment, reverence and surrealism. Our research goals are therefore to provide a theoretical framework that includes an understanding of the construct of wonder, foundational premises associated with this new paradigm, and to demonstrate how wonder can be exploited in branding.

The core of this research lies in the development of (i) a theoretical framework for research on wonder in branding and (ii) key foundational premises (FPs) for the evolving wonder paradigm in branding. Using an indigenous theory development, inductive realist approach, seven foundational premises related to brand wonder and (i) awe, (ii) astonishment, (iii) lack of comprehension, (iv) transcendence, (v) bewilderment, (vi) surrealism, and (vii) reverence are developed. This research makes multiple unique research contributions to the literature. First, we introduce a theoretical framework for the construct of wonder in branding. Second, we develop a set of foundational premises that may serve as theoretical underpinnings to help researchers better identify research problems and develop solutions in the future. Third, we examine experiences with brand wonder to demonstrate the power and usefulness of brand wonder in areas such as brand inhibition (Erevelles and Horton 1998), co-branding (Erevelles et al. 2008), personal selling (Erevelles and Fukawa 2013), etc. This research is likely the first to introduce a theoretical framework for brand wonder. Without a doubt, considerable future research is needed to gain a better understanding of the topic. It may be reasonable to conclude, however, that our research serves as an important first step in the study of this important construct.

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Sunil Erevelles received his PhD in Marketing from The Ohio State University. He is on the faculty of marketing at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and served as the Chair of the Department of Marketing from 2010-2018. His research interests include Big Data, blockchain, affect and branding.

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Key words: branding, brands, wonder, affect, emotion