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FRANZ LIEBL

From branding goods to hacking brands

A beginner's guide to the brand universe

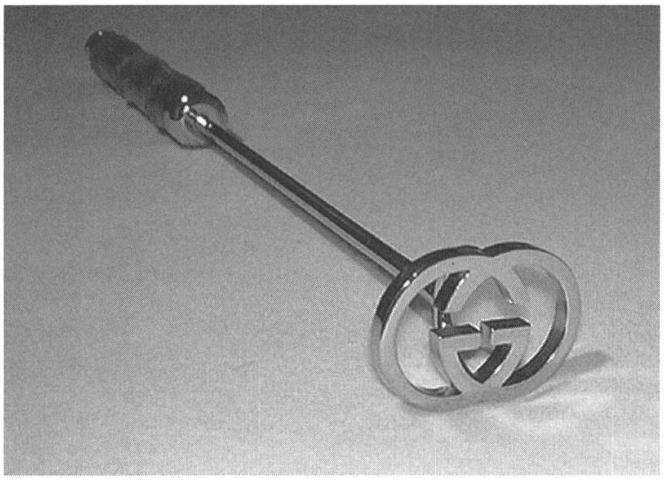
Joseph, you need a hat. Otherwise nobody will remember your face.
Advertising photographer Charles Wilp to Joseph Beuys

Because brands are seen as the prominent and ubiquitous representations of globally active companies today, it is easy to forget that labelling and marking are cultural techniques that have served to symbolize origin, ownership or identity for thousands of years. Inasmuch, today's general logomania is merely the culmination of a logical development to date – the economic dimension of these cultural techniques was recognized and skilfully exploited at an early stage. Knowledge of such historical developments can also be extremely useful today. However, the development of effective branding strategies also requires adequate 'brand' concepts. For this reason, this article aims to investigate what the most important brand models can achieve from a strategic perspective, and which conclusions can be drawn in terms of the evolution of a brand.

Early history of branding

Marks are already to be found on Greek ceramics dating from the Archaic period to Hellenism, and labels of origin on amphorae were already important for the wine trade in Graeco-Roman antiquity.[1] 'From a historical perspective, the 'non-economic' emblems represent the basis for development of brands',[2] asserts Leitherer. Brands thus represent a special form of labelling in that they have an economic function, as opposed to merely designating origin or belonging to a certain household.

A wide variety of forms of (product) marking/branding are already apparent in early cultural history. They include technical guarantees, such as information on quantities and content (e.g. the proportion of fine metal in alloys), as well as specifying manufacturing processes and indications of origin in assembly production[3] or when parts are supplied from elsewhere, in order to allow guarantees to be given and to build trust. In societies that made only limited use of script, labelling goods with symbols, and particularly the use of seals, had an important symbolic function as well as serving to protect property.[4] This is especially manifest in the case of the literal 'branding' of livestock, for which there is evidence in Egypt as of about 2000 BC.[5] 'Branding' is a term that emerged with the expansion of cattle breeding in North America (fig. 1).[6]



1 Branding iron: contemporary example provided by the fashion company Gucci

In the Middle Ages a kind of double marking began to establish itself for some types of products; besides the master craftsman's label of origin, another mark was given by a quality checker and ensured more than local recognition. There is evidence of the use of markings in trade as of the fourteenth century.[7] These performed two functions: firstly to avoid confusion during the transport of goods, and secondly to document the origin of the goods at their destination by way of a trust-building quality indicator.

However, the actual implementation of branding began only in the Renaissance. There are two reasons for this: with the emergence of manufactories, companies replaced the individual craftsman as protagonists in the market – meaning that trust had to be established in companies rather than people. On the other hand, world trade began to develop during this period. Porcelain in particular played a pioneering role in this development, because at the time it was not only a preferred object of world trade, but also a product to which the manufacturer's label of origin could be affixed especially easily.[8]

The transition to contemporary branded goods completed in the nineteenth century in the wake of the Industrial Revolution and accompanied by appropriate branding and patents laws meant another radical step in this direction. Goods were no longer made to order to specifications given by the customer, but produced to an ever-greater extent for anonymous, mass markets. And as a consequence of the increasingly complex production processes, products and their characteristics tended to become 'black boxes'. Both these phenomena required that customer trust-building measures be intensified. On the other hand, industrial production enabled the manufacture of products with defined characteristics, and progress in packing, sealing and labelling techniques also made it possible to mark products of all kinds – not only those onto which it was possible to affix a trademark directly. Thus the prerequisites were created to provide orientation for customers of the self-service department stores that emerged in the late nineteenth century, despite the disappearance of ad-

vice from the dealer. That orientation was not only provided immediately at the point of sale, where goods 'speak for themselves', but was also increasingly backed up by advertising, which operates with the brand as its specific point of reference.[9] The relationship of trust created through branding was accordingly transformed from personified trust in the manufacturer and his skills into objectified trust in the product and its – invariable – characteristics: manufacturers' brands retreated in favour of product brands.

Brands in the age of ubiquitous branding

This outlines the essential, much-cited characteristics of branded goods, which still largely apply today. They signalize a defined quality and hence reduce the purchase and consumption risk taken by the customer. The brand refers to a relationship of trust: anyone who, due to health problems, has ever looked for risk-free food in an emerging country will suddenly appreciate the omnipresence of global fast-food chains, even if they normally despise hamburgers. Brands thus embody something like a self-fulfilling expectation: brand management is equivalent to a combination of expectation management and perception management.

Several other merits of brands have also emerged. By concentrating a complex set of characteristics in a single symbol, the brand provides relief in the daily jungle of information overload. And where products are becoming increasingly similar in terms of technology and function and the infringement of minimum quality standards is no longer a subject of discussion, many manufacturers have learnt how to differentiate themselves from one another by lending their brands positive emotions or social prestige by means of appropriate brand communication: 'Gucci has become godlike',[10] is how Eisenhut, for example, summarizes the success of Tom Ford, who transformed the ailing brand into an object of desire within a few years. And people occasionally say that Apple does not have customers, but disciples. Due to these quasi-religious phenomena the most recent marketing literature no longer talks about brand trust, but 'brand creed'.[11] This is undoubtedly more justified than terms such as 'brand cult' or 'cult brands', for two reasons owing to the dual meaning of the term creed: firstly, according to this interpretation, brands become a kind of act of faith in the imaginations of those who buy them; secondly, it refers to the willingness of consumers to talk openly about their decisions regarding consumption or brands – which has proven to be highly effective mouth-to-mouth propaganda, because it appears to be authentic.

The consequence of this is that people try to elevate anything and everything to a brand. Industrial goods manufacturers, the bookshop or the dentist's practice around the corner, the provincial town, television stations and universities: all of

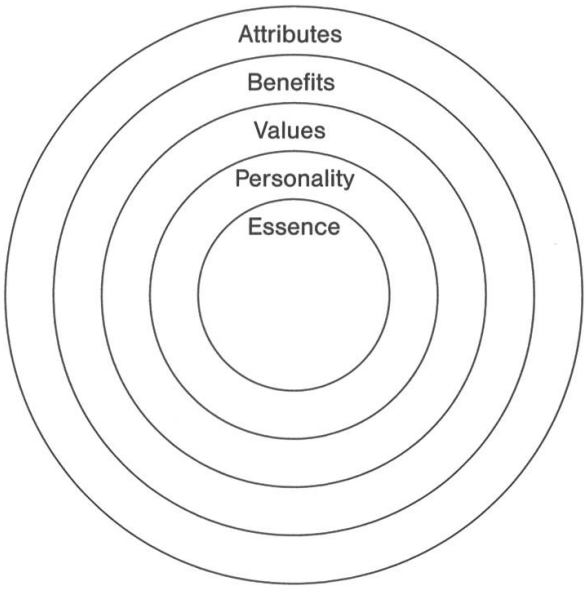
them feel the need – usually on the advice of consultants – to become a brand.[12] And whereas personality traits used to be ascribed to brands, brand status is now also conferred on people – particularly celebrities.[13] However, in most of these discussions, one fundamental question is ignored that really must be clarified if a strategic management of the brand is to be ensured: what is a 'brand' in the first place?

Firstly, in legal terms, a 'brand' is a commercial property right.[14] Secondly, marks, trademarks (i.e. logos and claims or 'corporate design') or branded goods are equated with brands – the result of a simplistic, imprecise use of the term. However, we have already seen in the case of the historical examples discussed that a brand is apparently a system of symbols with at times complex cross-references. This system of symbols is supposed to be anchored in the imaginations of the consumers and to trigger specific behaviour – of a physical, cognitive or emotional nature. Inasmuch, brands are an intermediary connector between a company and its products on the one hand and the customer on the other. A description model for brands must therefore be measured against this, according to the extent to which it is in a position to illustrate such complex cross-references, and to place it in an appropriate relation to the addressees' 'world' (i.e. lifeworld, knowledge, perceptions, experiences and imagination). The following section presents the most important models in the marketing literature and examines their conclusiveness and effectiveness.

The brand essence model

The description model for brands that still dominates today is the brand essence model, which aims to reveal the actual core meaning of a brand. Based on the physically perceivable characteristics of the product or product range, it attempts to elaborate the facets of a brand's 'personality' by describing its basic functional benefits and emotional added value. These 'personality traits' are then seen as the expression of a 'brand essence', a concentrate of what – hopefully – makes the brand unrivalled in the eyes of the consumer, and what it is supposed to stand for. The 'essence', 'substance', 'genetic code', 'reason why' and 'unique selling proposition' (USP) of a brand are common synonyms for this (fig. 2).

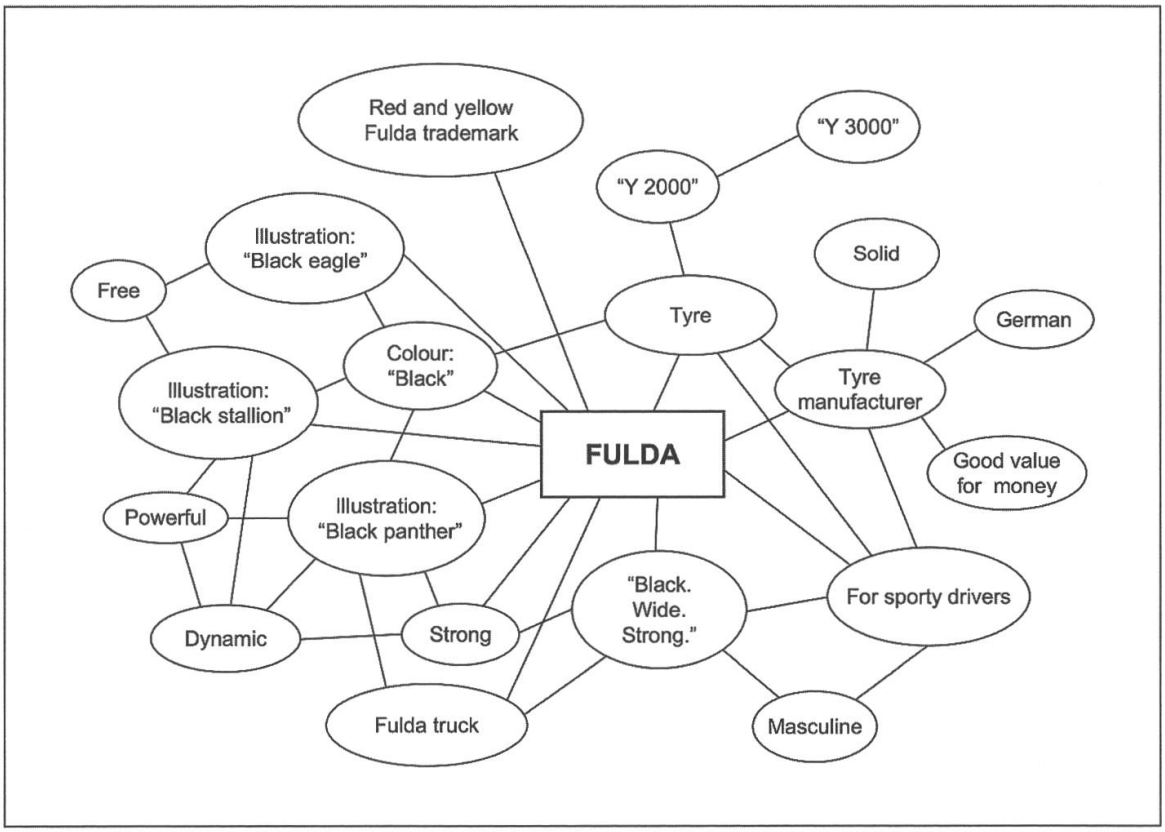
However, many brand essences given as examples in the marketing literature are not convincing. On the one hand, the claims familiar from advertising are often simply reproduced when brand essences are formulated, such as BMW's slogan 'Freude am Fahren'.[16] Moreover, there are considerable divergences of opinion among experts as to what constitutes an allegedly unambiguous brand essence, for example in the case of Richard Branson's Virgin group. While 'rebellion' is postulated in the literature as the general essence of the Virgin brand in one publication, and 'youthfulness'



2 Brand essence model[15]

and 'playfulness' are paraded as central elements in another, Branson himself condenses the brand essence to a simple and conclusive formula: he prefers to become involved in businesses where he as a customer was disappointed by the existing services on offer.

The term 'brand essence' claims explicitly that this model is an essentialist brand concept, which implies that the brand 'in itself' – and hence irrespectively of its context – embodies a specific, clearly defined entity. Indeed, on closer inspection it becomes clear that, strictly speaking, a brand essence is used to formulate a normative objective rather than stating attributions made by consumers. However, the most interesting issue from a strategic marketing viewpoint is that of the customer perspective and the way this is described. As long ago as 1985, in his famous book *Competitive Advantage*, Michael Porter drew attention to the fact that brands can only differentiate themselves from their competitors when customers *perceive* a product or service as different and also *appreciate* this difference.[17] So competition does not take place in an abstract sense 'in the market', but specifically 'in the minds of the customers'. Of course, this also applies to brands, which explains what the consumer researcher Fournier means when she talks about 'consumers and their brands'.[18] Brands may legally 'belong' to companies and be 'managed' based on decisions taken by management, yet they are 'in the possession' of consumers, because the latter exploit and experience brands, interpret them in their own way, compare them with other brands, and share their experiences and fantasies with other consumers. And the way a brand is perceived often has little to do with the ideal image of the brand's essence in the heads of the marketing managers.[19]



3 Semantic network of the Fulda brand[20]

The association model

While the brand essence model is based on abstraction and concentration, the association model attempts to capture the spectrum of spontaneous associations that a brand evokes within the customer or consumer, and to interpret these as facets of a 'brand personality'. The result is presented in the form of a 'semantic network' (fig. 3).

By contrast with the brand essence model, characteristics attributed to a brand are collected, but the assessment of the attributions remains open, as does the question of whether these spontaneous associations already characterize[21] a brand sufficiently, and whether these attributions occur in typical combinations. Thus the association model provides no answer to the question of whether a brand may have a competitive advantage over other brands – or for which customer segments this could apply.

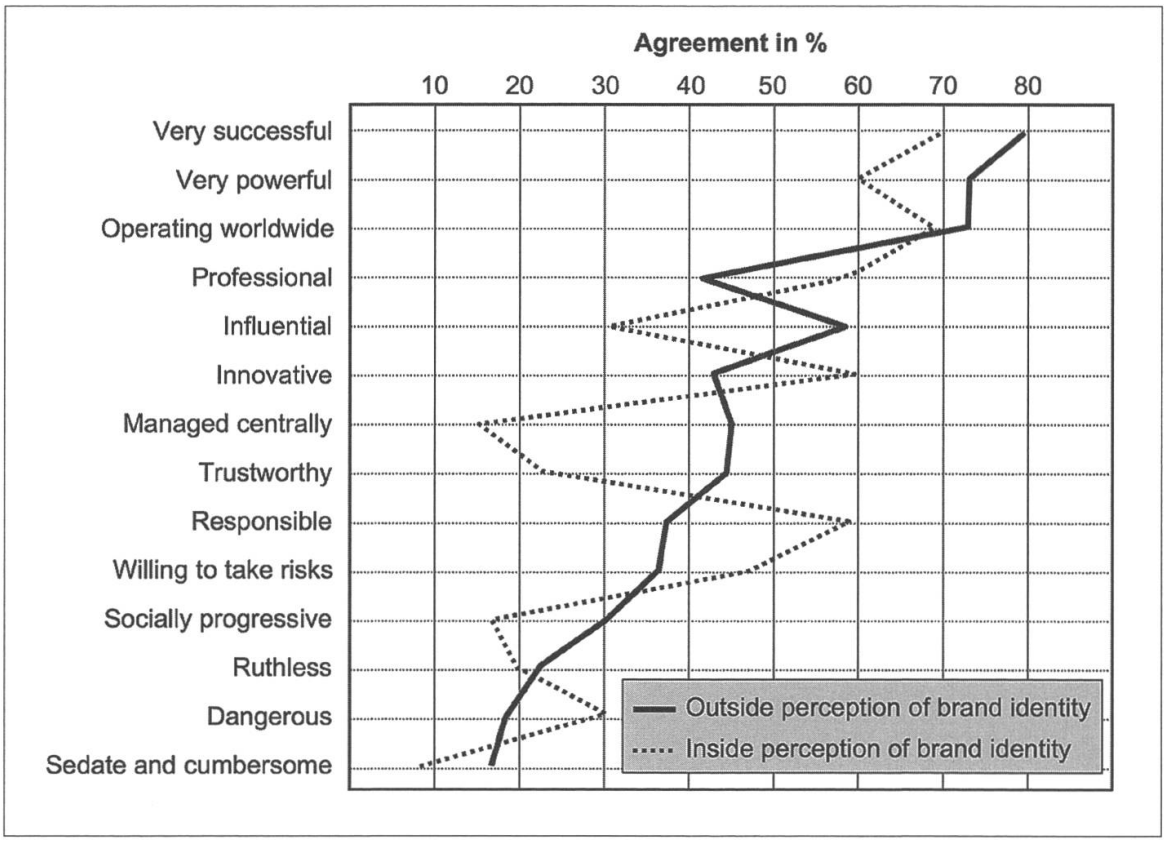
The identity model

Since the early 1990s, the idea of brand identity has become increasingly important in marketing theory.[22] According to this theory, 'the brand should be defined as a firmly anchored, distinctive image of a product or service in the minds of consumers

and other stakeholders'.[23] By comparing the brand's self-image with the way it is perceived by others, this model is supposed to identify identity gaps and measures to improve the fit between the two, as well as bringing about convergence with an intended 'ideal' image.

However, the apologists of this approach do not implement the concept of identity as the result of interaction (between supply and consumer demand) very consistently. The fundamental characteristics of the brand are repeatedly described with essentialist metaphors such as that of the 'genetic code',[24] meaning that normative ideals and analytical descriptions are so intermingled as to be indistinguishable. This situation is further exacerbated by the conceptually remarkably simple definition of an 'identity' by means of predefined attributes profiles (fig. 4). The origin of this list of attributes remains unexplained, as does the question as to whose relevance systems they represent. This still applies when the profiles are the results of 'target-group-specific' surveys. If the concept of identity-oriented brand management is taken seriously, asking how the identity profiles of the brand appear in the eyes of the individ-

4 Brand profiles[25]



ual target groups does not go far enough. The customer segments that are really relevant to branding strategy cannot be defined on the basis of conventional target group characteristics; instead, it is precisely the different, specific perception of and relationships to the focal brand that distinguish the segments from one another. In other words, determining the target groups – on the basis of socio-demographic criteria or milieu-related variables, for example – is not the *point of departure* of a brand analysis, but different attributions to a brand are constitutive for brand-related customer segments that represent the *result* of such an analysis.

What does this imply? 'Consensus' about a brand does not necessarily mean that customers uniformly make the same attributions; rather, such a 'strong' brand typically provides a surface onto which different customer groups can project their own, very personal attributes. A photographic project by the German artists and filmmakers W.+B. Hein dating from the 1980s clearly reveals this. They photographed numerous billboards in the United States with Marlboro advertisements that had been defaced with graffiti. On many photos, sexual attributes were added to the cowboy figure (erect phalluses protruding from his hat, etc.) – and in such a way that a homoerotic interpretation immediately presented itself. In other words, while the cowboy triggers the traditional interpretation as a 'straight', 'masculine' man with the attributes of 'freedom and adventure' that exactly matches one customer segment, for another segment he embodies a gay icon, and just as precisely. This ability to meet antithetical requirements and persuasions simultaneously and equally conclusively is described as 'interpretive flexibility'[26] or 'paradessence'.[27]

'Brand universe': gaining access to the brand in the minds of the customers

If the strategic potential of a brand's identity is to be tapped, the focus must be placed consistently on interaction with the consumers. This means focusing not only on the brand identity, but also on the 'worlds' and identities of the recipients or customers. If these two aspects are to be connected, the following four questions suggest themselves:

1. What do customers perceive as the brand? Is it merely the name, logo and slogan, or possibly far more?
2. How does this brand make itself apparent in the 'worlds' of the customers? And how do they experience the brand in connection with these 'worlds'?
3. What is attributed to the brand as a result? And what social dynamics does this imply?
4. Are these attributions homogeneous or not? Are characteristic patterns – and hence recipient segments – identifiable?

In order really to understand customers and their 'worlds' with regard to brands, a radical change of perspective is required. That change of perspective consists in brand researchers, similarly to ethnologists and anthropologists, perceiving consumers as alien, exotic tribes whose cultures must be discovered: their rites, their fetishes, their environmental contexts and other parts of their 'worlds' – and without imposing their own cultural interpretative patterns on those alien cultures. In other words, we have to reconstruct the relevant facets of the customer perspective. Empathy is required, because only those who are capable of identifying the appropriate anchor points in the 'world' of the customers can exploit them for the purposes of strategic brand management. Conventional customer surveys, on the other hand, always have the fatal tendency to ask about problems *of the company* that the customers do *not* have. Consequently, it is about discovery, learning from the customers, rather than confirming prefabricated hypotheses.

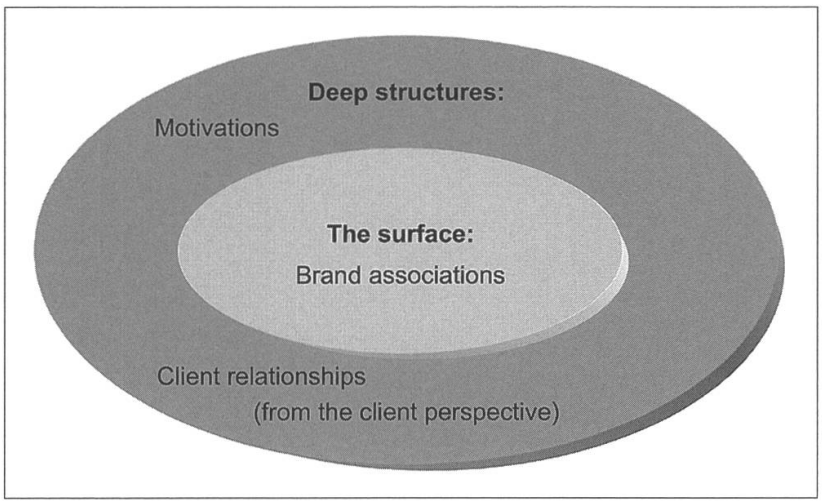
Anthropology and ethnology have provided the inspiration for a series of effective ethnographic research methods that allow access to the customer's 'world'. However, a cautious approach is required if one wishes to be in a position to discover unexpected aspects – which are the most important results of exploratory studies. This can be achieved by allowing customers to tell stories – stories that they have experienced while using the products and services of the brand. The reason why stories are particularly suitable: if a customer can tell stories about something, what he has experienced is evidently firmly rooted in his mind. This retention is created either through repetition of the same or through the particularly unusual, surprise and enthusiasm.[28] So when customers tell positive stories, this can be interpreted as a good sign, such as stories like '*At minus 28 degrees Celsius no other car would start – only our VW Beetle*.' On the other hand, it is of course alarming when negative stories are told, but that is also the case when customers cannot tell any stories at all. Evidently, in such cases the company's performance is unremarkable and mediocre, or only a vague image of the brand is created in the customer's mind due to the fact that the brand's performance is sometimes good and sometimes bad. In other words, if a brand is not in a position to produce stories in the minds of the customers, its right to exist in the market is called into question.[29]

The stories about experiences reflect not only the regularity and irregularity of the business system in question and performance of the brand, but also the lifeworld contexts in which the product is used and the relevance systems of those being interviewed. As the studies we have conducted in a wide variety of sectors have revealed, the respondents referred to a comparatively small number of typical patterns and 'reasons why'. Along the same lines, Leonard and Rayport report that, when telling

stories about household cleaning products, consumers recurrently referred to certain contexts. The positive role of scent was particularly emphasized; either because it arouses feelings of nostalgia ('*My mother used this*'), or because it elicited emotional satisfaction ('*When it smells clean, it makes all my work worthwhile*').[30] Such attributions and 'reasons why', which occur as identifiable patterns in the 'worlds' of the customers, can be strategically exploited for product development and branding purposes. And ultimately, on the basis of such information, customer segments can be identified that are largely homogeneous in the way they behave when buying or using a product, and can be addressed in a similar way.

What detailed conclusions for an appropriate representation of brands can be drawn? The ethnographic investigations of how customers experience and perceive brands show that 'essences' or 'personalities' are in many cases inadequate or even misleading descriptions of brands. Trying to boil down the facets of a brand to a single essential, generally accepted characteristic is tantamount to *reductio ad absurdum*. Thus even the brand essence of well-known and allegedly strong brands proves to be negligible, and sometimes even non-existent. If we look at the major petrol station brands in Germany, for example, the generally accepted essence of the strongest brand (Aral) reveals only one characteristic: blue. That may not seem very much, but Aral is way ahead of its competitors because, unlike the Aral blue, German car owners usually remember the colours of the other petrol stations incorrectly. Similar experiences are also recorded in other sectors when it comes to identifying the logos, slogans or other material characteristics of a brand. In addition, if such a brand essence exists at all, then it does not distinguish between customers and non-customers. In other words, the essence tends to be trivial from a strategic point of view, because it ultimately does not function as the basis for measures that could be taken to increase the distinctiveness of a brand against its competitors. Strictly speaking, the brand's essence is not the essence at all, but the result of a superficial association with the brand. Instead, it embodies the *surface* of the brand, and a trivial one at that; it serves at best as a point of departure for analysing the brand. With certain nuances, this applies to all the brand models discussed above, as these work either with spontaneous and thus primarily descriptive associations or general, predefined lists of attributes.

However, beneath the superficial associations lie deep structures that can provide a great deal of information about the brand and its customers. On the one hand, as the stories told by customers reveal, these deep structures are based on motivations for use and interpretive contexts, in which the product or service on offer is embedded. Another important piece of information is how the customers see themselves in



5 Facets of a 'brand universe'

relation to the brand, i.e. how they themselves experience and qualify their relationship to the brand.[31] Of particular importance is the question of whether customers perceive themselves as regular customers, in other words if a brand really is 'their brand', irrespective of any predefined target values for quantities or frequency of purchase. Possible further elements of what we shall be referring to later as the 'brand universe' (fig. 5) are the observed or stereotypical behaviour of other users of the brand as well as the brand history, which is based not so much on specific, personal experiences as on handed-down anecdotes and hearsay, in other words, on cultural memory.[32]

Unlike the brand essence model, which seeks to observe brands from an essentialist perspective, the concept of the 'brand universe' should be understood as 'strategically anti-essentialist, but also as anti-anti-essentialist'.[33] This means that the attributes consumers project onto a brand are always real, but never inevitable. However, it is true that a brand fulfils certain functions or has a certain meaning for a specific customer segment because a relationship has been established between their own experience and the brand in question – an insight into the character of *social* constructs that has been known as the 'Thomas Theorem'[34] since the late 1920s.

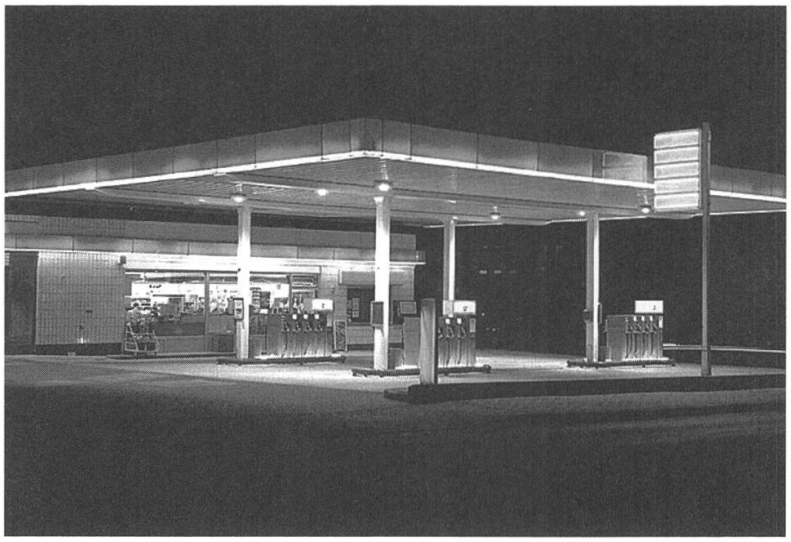
Implications of the 'brand universe' model

On closer inspection of fig. 5, the metaphor behind the model of the 'brand universe' could be summarized as follows: at the end of the day, brands are like doughnuts. In reality, they do not have a core, but have a more or less large hole in the middle as an expression of the *je ne sais quoi* described above; but they consist of a big, fat ring in

the form of a complex intermingling of personal experience, demands and desires (one's own, or stimulated by advertising), imagination, and, perhaps, a portion of hearsay. For this reason, a great deal can be experienced as a brand and exceed conventional materialization by means of logos, claims, advertising as well as the physical product by far. In the retail and service industries it is primarily the huge variety of customer contact points that contributes to the experience of the brand and hence to the 'brand universe'. As in the case of the petrol station business – a combination of product, retail and supplementary services – this can even lead to the brand and the business system being considered one and the same. This is particularly true when the brand is experienced as an ergonomic, consistently reproduced corporate design including the corresponding business processes, thus providing orientation that can be experienced physically on site. In such cases, customers can be in a position to describe shop layouts in detail or stress that they stay with one particular provider because they can intuitively find their way about. Offering every customer segment a targeted orientation service means more than merely being recognizable by virtue of a trademark, coupled with the vaguely abstract promise that everything will be the same as it always has been. Availability, ergonomics, aesthetics, error tolerance, the friendliness of staff and the systematic replication of features in a network of outlets do play a part, although with a different configuration and emphasis for each segment. For strategic brand management, consideration should therefore be given to which measures can strengthen the distinctive character of the brand in one segment without causing irritation in the others.

If these results are taken seriously, the brand can be perceived as a kind of symbolic, emotional and ergonomic 'user interface' to the customer, and it can be noted that brands ultimately embody systems of relationships and orientation that emerge from the collaboration of supplier and user. In other words, in view of their deep structure, brands function as complex frameworks of reference with the aid of which customers structure their physical and mental 'worlds'. Customer orientation is not so much about orienting the brand *towards* the customer, but about the customer *being oriented by* the brand. If this is achieved, one can rightly talk about a 'strong brand' – which is true of Gucci and Apple as well as Aral.

Much can be made of this radically formulated brand model. For example, the significance in strategic terms of a brand essence simply being 'blue' suddenly becomes clear when looking at fig. 6, a photograph by the artist Ralf Peters entitled *Open Studies – Blau* (blue). It shows an Aral service station from which all logotypes referring to the brand have been removed. The only exception is the colour: the roof, petrol pumps, the neon lighting on the shop front and the mast showing petrol prices have

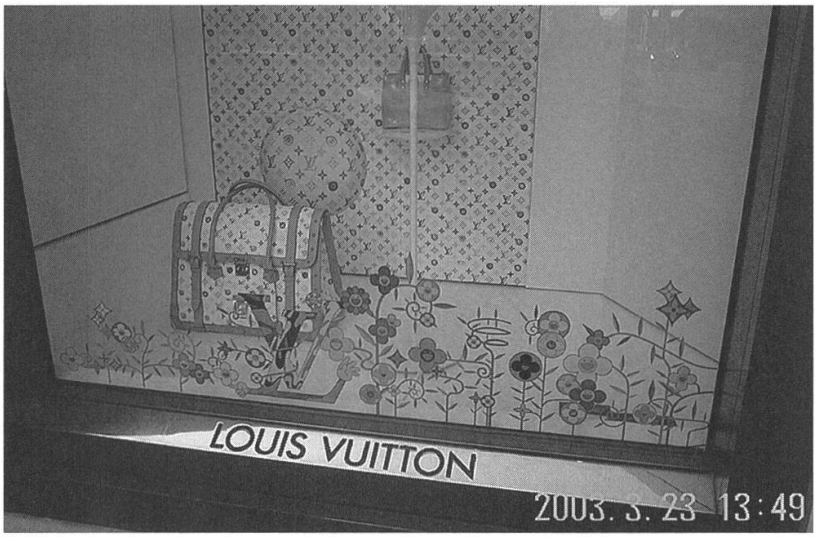


6 Ralf Peters, *Tankstelle blau*, 1998, Laserchrome Diasec, 60 x 80 cm

retained their brand-specific blue colouring. Yet if an Aral customer were to drive into a service station that had been manipulated in such a way he would still immediately find his way about. Orientation is still guaranteed, just as would be expected of a strong brand. It is thus not the fact that the brand essence is merely a colour possessing specific cultural or historico-cultural codes and connotations that is of strategic importance – blue perhaps as a symbol of money, water or a royal house. Instead, it is the fact that, via that colour, the customers (can) recall a specific, internalized business system, which has been made available to them and is better anchored in their minds than others. Ralf Peters's photograph clearly documents how brand essence, associative patterns, competitive positioning and identity concept suddenly enter into an alliance in a 'brand universe', resulting in an 'overall picture' of strategic importance.

Brand hacking: strategic work on orientation by means of subversion

By taking the 'worlds' of its addressees and users as the point of departure for observation, the concept of the 'brand universe' means not only a sufficiently complex notion of what should be perceived as the brand, but also requires specific methods of data collection. As we have seen, this leads to far-reaching conclusions. Focusing on the orientation function of the brand for its strategic development is therefore the obvious course to take, rather than blindly following the monotonous calls to be 'more emotional', 'younger' or 'cooler'. And concentrating one's efforts at development on increasing the number and variety of channels in the area of brand communication, as is the case with more recent branding techniques – e.g. 'brandscaping',[35]



7 Window of the Louis Vuitton flagship store, Paris

'brandcasting'[36] and 'synaesthetic branding'[37] – possibly neglects a brand's complex deep structure. One aspect that has proven to be of central importance thanks to the 'brand universe' concept is the fact that brands are to a large extent dependent on their context. This is precisely where the method of 'brand hacking' is applied, i.e. the strategic recoding of brands and the processing of brand contexts.[38]

Brand hacking is the attempt to cause brand disorientation by varying and reprogramming the brand context in a playful but systematic manner. This is modelled on the situationist strategies of *détournement*.[39] The aim is to explore the consequences of shifts in meaning, the particularly sensitive areas of the brand and the limits of brand strategies in a subversive manner; the next step is to identify anchor points for reorientation. This approach thus works against the brand, for the brand. Numerous successful brand hacking projects, especially by artists, already exist, such as the rejuvenation of the slightly dusty luxury brand Louis Vuitton by means of the Japanese pop motifs of Takashi Murakami (fig. 7).

Brand hacking is far more than the malapropism of brand names and logos – typically on T-shirts, where Esso becomes Eros, for example, or fnac becomes fuck. It is also more than adbusting, subvertising and related variants of so-called 'culture jamming',[40] which aims primarily to express a generally critical attitude towards consumerism by manipulating campaigns, billboards or TV spots, but due to its highly restricted recoding is able neither to reveal nor substantially to develop the way in which the brand in question functions. Brand hacking, on the other hand, produces

8 Sarah Baker, LK collection

experimental arrangements for a strategic intervention in the product–brand–customer system, even if it may appear 'irregular' or 'unprofessional' from the perspective of the system itself. In reality it is more of an artistic intervention. The brand hacker thus combines the (analytical and systematic) practices of the engineer or scientist with the (creative and playful) practices of the artist.[41]

Besides the works commissioned, there are of course several 'unauthorized' – but no less striking – designs, such as the work of the Parisian designer Ora-Ïto[42] in the case of Louis Vuitton. These reveal that such recoding is by no means solely based on manipulations of the appearance of a brand; shifts in context that refer to specific aspects in the 'worlds' of customers are frequently more instructive. This is also true of the London artist Sarah Baker, whose work takes the glamour strategies of hip-hop artists like Lil' Kim as a central theme. Since the LV label is firmly established on the hip-hop scene, Sarah Baker launched a ladies' collection labelled Lil' Kim (LK), which not only reinvents Louis Vuitton in the hip-hop context, but also positions the brand closer to Murakami than Louis Vuitton would ever have dared for its own collection (fig. 8).

This example illustrates how the concept of the 'brand universe' also provides the basis for the development of a brand, particularly for stages in its evolution that are innovative and can be connected to the 'worlds' of users. This is the central challenge for strategic brand management today, for only when this combination of innovation and accessibility is guaranteed will greater differentiation be possible in the logo jungle.

1 See E. Leitherer, 'Geschichte der Absatzwirtschaft', in B. Tietz, ed., *Handwörterbuch der Absatzwirtschaft*, Stuttgart, 1974, cols. 666–74.
2 E. Leitherer, 'Das Markenwesen der Zunftwirtschaft', *Der Markenartikel*, vol. 18, 1956, pp. 685–707, p. 685.
3 E.g. master's or workshop marks.
4 See P. Mollerup, 'History of Trademarks', in L. Holger and I. Holmberg, eds., *Identity. Trademarks, Logotypes and Symbols*, Stockholm, 2002, pp. 29–36; E. Leitherer, 'Geschichte der Markierung und des Markenwesens', in M. Bruhn, ed., *Die Marke. Symbolkraft eines Zeichensystems*, Berne, 2001, pp. 55–74.
5 See Mollerup 2002 (see note 4).
6 '[...] the English term *branding* derives etymologically from the Old Norse word *brandr*, i.e. to burn or mark by burning [...]': J. Eriksson, 'Branding Among the Condottori', in Holger/Holmberg 2002 (see note 4), pp. 39–48, p. 39. A. Frutiger, *Der Mensch und seine Zeichen: Schriften, Symbole, Signets, Signale*, 9th edn, Wiesbaden, 2004, p. 326 provides numerous examples of branding marks from North America dating from the 16th to 18th centuries.
7 See Frutiger 2004 (see note 6), p. 326.
8 See Leitherer 2001 (see note 4); Mollerup 2002 (see note 4).
9 See E. Leitherer, 'Warenverpackungen unter technischen und sozio-ökonomischen Kriterien', in E. Leitherer and H. Wiechmann, *Reiz und Hülle: Gestaltete Warenverpackungen des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, Basle, 1987, pp. 9–111, p. 22.
10 J. J. Eisenhut, 'Integratives Business Design', *form.diskurs*, nos. 8/9, 'Design Economy', 2000/1, pp. 42–9, p. 49.
11 E.g. J. Kunde, *Corporate Religion. Building a Strong Company Through Personality and Corporate Soul*, London, 2000; B. Bierach, 'Die Seele der Marke', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, no. 119, 24/25.5.2003, p. 28; P. Zernisch, *Markenglauben managen – Eine Markenstrategie für Unternehmer*, Weinheim, 2003.
12 See F. Liebl, 'Die Marken-Seuche', *brand 1*, vol. 3, no. 5, June 2001, pp. 142–3.
13 The phenomenon of celebrities as brands – even with their own product portfolio, like Heidi Klum, Jennifer Lopez or Kylie Minogue – is by no means new. The virtuosity with which Sylvie Vartan showed how this should be done as long ago as the 60s and 70s can be regarded as exemplary: not only were there collections that bore her name, but even a chain of shops called after her that can now be considered as concept stores *avant la lettre*. (See Musée Galliera, ed., *Sylvie Vartan: Revue de mode*, Paris, 2004.)
14 See e.g. H. Schröder, 'Neuere Entwicklungen des Markenschutzes. Markenschutz-Controlling vor dem Hintergrund des Markengesetzes', in R. Köhler, W. Majer and H. Wiezorek, eds., *Erfolgsfaktor Marke: neue Strategien des Markenmanagements*, Munich, 2001, pp. 309–22; P. J. Nordell, 'Law in the Service of Brands and Trademarks', in Holger and Holmberg 2002 (see note 4), pp. 93–106.
15 From: Bates Worldwide, *Brand Wheel/Brand Essence*, London, s.d.
16 'Freude am Fahren' can roughly be translated as 'The Joy of Driving'; the slogan BMW currently uses in English-speaking countries is 'The Ultimate Driving Machine'.
17 M.E. Porter, *Competitive Advantage – Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance*, New York, 1985.
18 S. Fournier, 'Consumers and Their Brands. Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research', *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 24, no. 3, 1998, pp. 343–73.
19 See F. Liebl, 'Was ist schon einmalig? USP – Mythos oder Realität?', *Econy*, vol. 2, no. 2, April/May 1999, pp. 116–17.
20 From O. Nickel, *Werbemonitoring*, Wiesbaden, 1997, p. 86.
21 The attributes typically prove to be largely descriptive or generic, as the example shown in fig. 3 reveals.
22 E.g. J.-N. Kapferer, *Strategic Brand Management*, New York, 1994; L.B. Upshaw, *Creating Brand Identity: A Strategy for Success in a Hostile Marketplace*, Chichester, 1995.
23 H. Meffert, C. Burmann and M. Koers, 'Stellenwert und Gegenstand des Markenmanagement', in H. Meffert, C. Burmann and M. Koers, eds., *Markenmanagement. Grundfragen der identitätsorientierten Markenführung*, Wiesbaden, 2002, pp. 3–15, p. 6.
24 J.-N. Kapferer, *Die Marke: Kapital des Unternehmens*, Landsberg am Lech, 1992, p. 111.

25 H. Meffert and C. Burmann, 'Managementkonzept der identitätsorienten Markenführung', in Meffert/Burmann/Koers 2002 (see note 23), pp. 73–97, p. 77.
26 W. E. Bijker, *Of Bicycles, Bakelites, and Bulbs: Toward a Theory of Sociotechnical Change*, Cambridge, Mass., 1997.
27 A. Shakar, *The Savage Girl*, London, 2001.
28 See H. Whitehouse, 'Jungles and Computers: Neuronal Group Selection and the Epidemiology of Representations', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1996, pp. 99–116; R.C. Schank and R.P. Abelson, 'Knowledge and Memory: The Real Story', in R.S. Wyer, ed., *Advances in Social Cognition*: Vol. 8 – *Knowledge and Memory: The Real Story*, Hillsdale, NJ, 1995, pp. 1–85.
29 See F. Liebl and O. G. Rughase, 'Storylistening', *gdi impuls*, vol. 20, no. 3.02, 2002, pp. 34–9.
30 D. Leonard and J. F. Rayport, 'Spark Innovation Through Empathic Design', *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 75, no. 6, November–December 1997, pp. 102–13.
31 See Fournier 1998 (see note 18).
32 See F. Liebl, C. Mennicken, T. Voigt and T. Wesener, "Ja, mit einem guten Gefühl auf jeden Fall.' Die Markenbilder von Aral und BP in den Köpfen der Kunden', in B. Vangerow, U. Franke, B. Lehmann, F. Liebl and C. Mennicken, eds., *Markenfusion. Strategie und Gestaltung – Warum Aral kommt und BP bleibt*, Basle, 2005, pp. 79–87; D. B. Holt, *How Brands Become Icons. The Principles of Cultural Branding*, Boston, Mass., 2004; B. Remaury, *Marques et récits. La marque face à l'imaginaire culturel contemporain*, Paris, 2004; S. Brown, R. V. Kozinets and J. F. Sherry, Jr., 'Teaching Old Brands New Tricks: Retro Branding and the Revival of Brand Meaning', *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 67, July 2003, pp. 19–33.
33 L. Grossberg, 'Cultural Studies. Was besagt ein Name?', *IKUS Lectures*, vol. 3, nos. 17+18, 'Cultural Studies – Eine Intervention', Vienna, 1994, pp. 11–40.
34 W. I. Thomas and D. S. Thomas, *The Child in America. Behavior Problems and Programs*, New York, 1928.
35 The attempt to influence the brand worlds of the consumers through experience-based, physical environments created by means of (landscape/interior) architecture, music or sounds, fragrances, etc. (cf. O. Riewoldt, ed., *Brandscaping. Erlebnisdesign für Einkaufswelten*, Basle, 2002; F. Liebl, '-hacking, -scaping, -casting: Neue Formen des Brand Management', in DVB Multimedia Bayern, ed., *Umbruch und Neuorientierung im Medienmarkt. Woher kommt das Wachstum der Zukunft? Dokumentation der Medientage München 2002*, Berlin, 2003, pp. 87–92).
36 Branded goods manufacturers act as the producers of media content for films and clips (cinema and/or television), computer games and internet (see Liebl 2003 [see note 35]).
37 These include acoustic branding by means of jingles, ring tones and characteristic product sounds such as engine noises or the sound of car doors closing, as well as olfactory manipulation by means of fragrance concepts in shops, at service stations or doctors' surgeries (see e.g. A. Schubert, 'Brand Religion. Vom schlichten Markenzeichen zum sinnstiftenden Orientierungssystem', in M. Baltes, ed., *absolute. Marken – Labels – Brands*, Freiburg, 2004, pp. 158–64).
38 See F. Liebl and W. Ullrich, 'Brand Hacking: Kontexte wechseln – neue Horizonte erreichen', *Absatzwirtschaft*, vol. 45, no. 6, June 2002, pp. 28–33.
39 See F. Liebl, T. Düllo and M. Kiel, 'Before and After Situationism – Before and After Cultural Studies. The Secret History of Cultural Hacking', in T. Düllo and F. Liebl, eds., *Cultural Hacking. Kunst des Strategischen Handelns*, Vienna and New York, 2005, pp. 13–46.
40 M. Dery, *Culture Jamming – Hacking, Slashing, and Sniping in the Empire of Signs*, Westfield, NJ, 1993.
41 See F. Liebl, 'The Art and Business of Cultural Hacking: eine Bestandsaufnahme', in T. Düllo and F. Liebl, eds., *Cultural Hacking. Kunst des Strategischen Handelns*, Vienna and New York, 2005, pp. 181–228; F. Liebl, '"Bricolo-Chic". Der Bastler als Schnittstelle von Marketing, Trendforschung und Cultural Studies', in U. Göttlich, W. Gebhardt and C. Albrecht, eds., *Populäre Kultur als repräsentative Kultur. Die Herausforderung der Cultural Studies*, Cologne, 2002, pp. 259–86.
42 See Liebl 2005 (see note 41).

Summary

Labelling is a cultural technique that has been employed for thousands of years to symbolize origin, property or identity. Over time, its economic dimension has become increasingly pronounced. Today, brands are considered a ubiquitous phenomenon, and there is a tendency to elevate anything and everything to the status of a brand. The consequences are severe: while companies have become aware of the importance of brand management, these inflationary tendencies have made implementation increasingly difficult. In view of this, the extent to which current concepts and descriptions of a 'brand' guide its strategic analysis and development becomes crucial.

This article presents the most common brand models – brand essence, association, and identity – and investigates what they can achieve in strategic terms. The limitations of these approaches are revealed by the fact that the necessary change of perspective – the transition from that of the company to that of the client – is not consistently put into practice. For this reason, a concept known as the 'brand universe' is presented, which examines the brand in the context of the 'worlds' of the customers. The adequate, empirical implementation of this concept allows the identification of anchor points for the strategic development of the brand.

The investigation of the 'brand universes' of customers has revealed that the orientation provided by brands frequently plays a central role for them. For this reason, the article concludes by presenting a method that targets the orientation function of a brand – usually in a subversive and artistic way: 'brand hacking'.