



To what extent is storytelling as an emotional marketing strategy an effective tool for international brands?

*Serat Thukral
Student*

The Shri Ram School Mousari

Abstract

The concept of marketing is ever-changing. Today, brands engage in marketing using traditional mediums such as television adverts and billboards but also newer mediums such as social media. That being said, where marketing was once focused primarily on selling a product, the concept of emotional marketing, which was introduced in the early 2000s, has changed the game by evolving marketing into a practice that enables brands to create connections with audiences through the use of strategies such as storytelling. In line with the aforementioned, this research paper conducts an in-depth analysis of emotional marketing with a specific focus on storytelling prior to evaluating the successful use of this strategy by Apple in their Shot on iPhone campaign. The latter half of the paper also provides insights into potential concerns with storytelling in marketing, especially with regard to authenticity.

Key Words: Marketing, Emotional Marketing, Storytelling, Apple, Shot on iPhone

Introduction

Are you buying the products manufactured in factories or the ones that are given thought and have a story?

In 2020 PepsiCo spent approximately \$5.4 billion on advertising and marketing activities (Urrutia, 2024), and PepsiCo did not even rank first with companies like Amazon spending \$10.9 billion dollars (Coppola, 2024), twice as much as PepsiCo. So why do companies allocate a hefty chunk of their budgets on marketing, what is it exactly? Although marketing in simple terms means the activities a firm does in order to promote the buying or selling of the

products it offers, which include advertising, selling, delivering, promotional schemes, and endorsements, the definition of the term has not remained constant from 1500 BCE. Marketing has evolved from a simple stamp to separate traders and merchants while goods were being bartered to print radio and telemarketing and eye-catching billboards at both central and secluded streets to the digital era where data is collected by almost every single website one visits to personalize the advertisement that pops up at the side of your computer while you scroll through an article.

Modern-day marketing allows the creation of a brand which is a name, design, symbol, or any other feature that distinguishes a seller's goods or service from those of its competitors on the market, however, presently a brand is almost always tethered to a story, something that not only allows potential customers to understand the origin or values of the brand but also creates an attachment and loyalty to the brand through playing on their emotions, needs and aspirations. Marc Gobé (2010) pioneered the concept of emotional marketing as he shared his insights with the world through 'Emotional Branding' a best-selling business book that revolutionized the shift in focus of firms from the products to the people with concepts such as a consumer democracy and empowering the buyers. Emotional marketing has gained prominence in recent times as it leverages the tendency of the majority of our decisions and behaviours, about 90% to 95%, being shaped non-consciously by the emotional brain (Shiv and Abrahams, 2020). So, while traditional marketing approaches focus on the product and its qualities to attempt to create sales, emotional marketing entails the use of strategies such as storytelling to create strong narratives and resonate with consumers - creating an arguably stronger and longer-lasting connection. In line with the aforementioned, this research paper aims to answer the question: **"To what extent is storytelling as an emotional marketing strategy an effective tool for international brands?"**

This paper analyses the concept and effect of emotional marketing with a specific focus on storytelling prior to evaluating the concepts through the lens of Apple's "Shot on iPhone" campaign.

An Introduction to Emotional Marketing and Storytelling

Marc Gobé (2010) coined the idea of emotional marketing with the help of his seminal work, "Emotional Branding: The New Paradigm for Connecting Brands to People", first published in 2001, which set the foundation for the concept as we know it today. Gobé revolutionized the traditional approach to marketing through a shift in the philosophy of marketing as a whole, taking focus away from functionality and price to the personal connection between a brand and a consumer. As the nature of the market has evolved, so have the mindsets of customers, along with the two so should the approach to selling a product. Emotional marketing delves into the consumer's psyche, playing on their hearts by integrating their beliefs and values into the brand, which often overdrives any rational or logical thought process. A comprehensive framework for emotional marketing is created with the help of various features such as; storytelling, brand experience, visual and design components, and cultural relevance.

Storytelling involves the communication of relatable compelling narratives that would resonate with consumers and their hopes, desires, or core beliefs elevating a purchase from a simple transaction to an act of support. Another powerful tool is the creation of an immersive and interactive experience that involves all of the five senses through various mediums to create a lasting positive impact on the consumer. The role of design and visual identity is also expanded upon as it incorporates symbols, colours such as white to symbolize purity, peace, and innocence, or numbers with significance to its consumers as design details in the brand create a memorable impact and subliminally convey the shared brand and consumer values, thus forging a connection (Decker, 2018). Lastly, adaptation to varying cultures and personalization is crucial as each culture has its own set of determined connotations relating to each idea or minuscule detail being conveyed, the presentation of the product and brand identity should be curated in accordance with the taste, preferences, and ideological beliefs of a community.

A combination of these tactics along with a consistent alignment of messaging, expectations, and actions thus creating trust and credibility creates loyalty in consumers as they affiliate various ideas and emotions such as empathy, joy, peace, or even sadness with a brand. Each different emotion elicits a reaction strategically used by brands; sadness creates empathy and pathos making consumers more likely to share or lend a helping hand which is often used by non-profit organizations for donations whilst happiness inclines one to share (Decker, 2018) thus creating higher brand awareness as consumers spread the word about their contentment with the product making it appealing to those around. Brand loyalty fostered by an authentic and credible public perception allows fascination and endorsement to be cultivated in consumers pushing them to follow their hearts instead of their heads, hearts that lead them to tie themselves to a brand that makes them feel seen, heard and valued. The aforementioned is presumably why 71% of customers recommend a brand based on emotional connection (Alcantara, 2023).

Moreover, emotional branding is seen as a saving grace in current overly crowded markets where consumers are bombarded and often overwhelmed with choices. Other than allowing the brand to stand out and creating loyalty, emotional marketing can create a higher value for the products as the consumers are not only paying for the utilitarian features but are also buying the identity of a brand and the values and narrative that prop it, along with the sensation that it creates. Emotional marketing breaks away from the simple conventions of traditional marketing by taking into account the entirety of the consumer experience and psychology instead of solely focusing on selling the product, it sells a feeling and experience making it unique. Furthermore, emotional marketing is versatile and not bound to a specific medium, the concept of focusing on emotional impact was prevalent in WW2 posters in the United States to create funds for the Liberty Trust and today in relatable advertisements that can lead to a 23% in sales by generating strong emotions (Hans, 2022). The ability of emotional branding has caused it to gain significant attention leading it to be used across diverse mediums and marketing forms, in all social media marketing, traditional marketing, and content marketing.

Storytelling - An Emotional Marketing Strategy

Brands establish enduring impressions to promote brand loyalty by designing stories which appeal to emotions among customers. Storytelling is a vital component of not only content marketing but emotional branding in its entirety, it uses a medley of fact and fiction to create a moving and compelling tale that evokes emotion and makes consumers more open and inclined to a brand, building unbreakable bonds. Storytelling involves providing consumers with context about how the product or service was created on a ground level, what led the entrepreneur to create the brand in the form of a launch story, a product narrative that focuses on how the brand product specifically will fulfil the desires of the consumer better than their competitors, consumer stories and an unbiased third persons experience (which consumer often find more reliable as 94% of consumers have read an online review in 2022 (Harrison, 2023)) and social impact stories that highlight the aim to create compassion as the brand is depicted as responsible and a contributor to disadvantaged communities and by supporting the brand the consumers will indirectly be responsible for the same thus bringing socially conscious consumers to have a preference to such brands.

These narratives are utilised as they 'show, not tell' providing credibility through visuals that encourage an authentic portrayal leading to genuine connections and trust development, stories remain with the audience as they are memorable, and one can recall facts up to 22 times (Harrison, 2023) more effectively when they are part of a story rather than just isolated data. Furthermore, stories communicate complex concepts in a simplified manner allowing maximum people to understand and connect with the brand. The imagined experiences that storytelling promotes cannot be differentiated from the real experiences of the consumer who has experienced 'narrative transport' allowing brands to create their own combined reality (UCL, 2023). Storytelling often unites readers regardless of their background through mutual pain points that are the base of human behaviour. Storytelling is the next best alternative for witnessing the impact of the product as it produces an experience that our brain can process 60 times faster than words (UCL, 2023). The consumer visualizes how their life would be affected by their choice to purchase from the particular brand, calling out to consumers and forcing them to take action as storytelling triggers the release of neurochemicals in the brain like dopamine, serotonin, and norepinephrine that trigger a psychological connection (Wang et al., 2020).

To create an effective story it must be entertaining, realistic, informative, organized and should resonate with the reader. These qualities are brought out through the central elements of narrative structure, character development and thematic elements. Most narratives follow Freytag's pyramid, where there's rising action until a climax is reached, followed by falling action and a resolution that provides a satisfying payoff - this journey that the consumers go through along with the brand allows the consumer to become invested through the use of tension roping them into feeling the emotions described themselves as the stress hormone cortisol stimulates further engagement. For example, Nike's "Just Do It" campaign often features narratives of overcoming adversity, inspiring audiences with

stories of triumph against all odds (Wyatt, 2023). Character development is further an essential element of riveting narratives. Companies make characters that embody their goals and ideals so that people may identify with them on a personal level. Brands develop empathy and brand loyalty by using pertinent characters to humanise their business. For example, Apple personified computers in its infamous "Mac vs. PC" advertisements, which presented the Mac as cool and creative and the PC as stiff and nerdy, appealing to users' sense of self (Haruna, 2018). Consistency is a crucial component in character development. Brands give their characters unique characteristics and keep them consistent throughout a range of marketing initiatives. Because of this familiarity and brand identification reinforcement, customers are more able to develop emotional attachments to brands. For example, Geico's gecko mascot regularly appears in its advertising, illustrating the brand's delightful and approachable image. Additionally, thematic elements are a crucial component of storytelling which involves using themes such as love, friendship, and empowerment to evoke specific emotions. Companies create a personal connection with consumers that goes beyond the characteristics of their products by connecting with these universal themes. For instance, Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign questions traditional notions of beauty and encourages people to engage in conversations about empowerment and self-acceptance. Lastly, the language used is crucial as each word has implicit and explicit meanings that create varied connotations among readers. Engaging with a story also activates the left temporal cortex of your brain, the region that is responsive to language (Heffernan, 2017). Additionally, this area of your brain can filter out "noise," or overused phrases ' which is why nuanced language and a variety of literary devices work to hold the audience's attention.

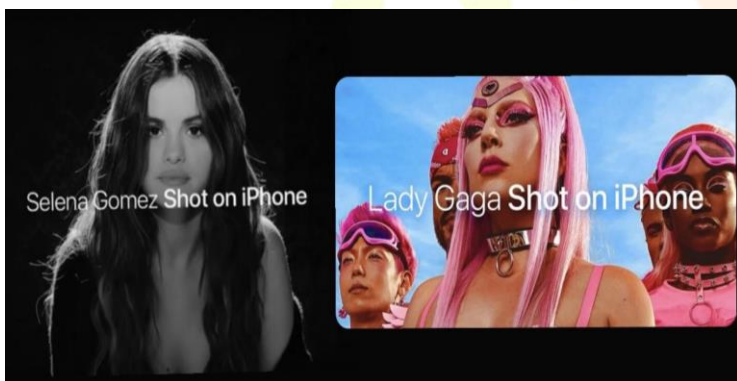
Case study - Apple's Shot on iPhone Campaign

Apple Inc. is an American technology multinational corporation based in Silicon Valley, California. The company designs, manufactures and sells consumer electronics, and computer software and provides online services. The company is the largest publicly traded United States company with the highest market capitalisation worldwide of 2.75 trillion US dollars in 2023 (Dyvik, 2023), exceeding all competition along with the gross domestic products of the majority of the global economies and the financial cost of the First World War (Kolakowski, 2021). However, the general public better knows Apple as the company behind the production of the iPhone or MacBook in every other person's hands. This section aims to explore how Apple utilised storytelling in their marketing campaigns in order to reach the level of success that it has today - the technology giant was able to effectively connect with its audience and thus create a distinct identity through the use of both personal and compelling narratives through the "Shot on iPhone" campaign.

The infamous "Shot on iPhone" campaign was created in 2014 and launched in 2015 (Sunil, 2022) with the purpose of showcasing the abilities of the newly launched iPhone 6 at the time, the campaign is still running today and has seen massive success with over 26 million user posts on Instagram alone (Sunil, 2022). The campaign diverted from the traditional approach and focused heavily on the consumer's story by tapping into user-generated content allowing

them to fortify an authentic and personal brand image. The campaign encourages consumers to upload pictures on social media with the hashtag #ShotoniPhone, with experienced judges selecting winners who will have their photographs featured on billboards or the official Apple website. This allows real people from all over the world to show unfiltered, high quality and raw pictures of landscapes or experiences in contrast to carefully crafted advertisements that lack a personal touch. The campaign allows ordinary people who are not professional photographers to display their best captures, thus conveying that anyone can use the camera features of the phone easily and create art effortlessly. The photo in itself is not just beautiful or pleasing to look at but also expresses a story, a core memory of a stranger who could be halfway across the world which fills the audience with awe allowing them to share the joys of others' heartfelt moments. More than that it also creates a sense of pride in Apple users, as they themselves can create impactful visuals with their devices and are a part of the Apple family, which helps store the best moments or ordinary moments in others' lives making their memories everlasting. The campaign did not only feature unknown people's daily lives, it also had well-known celebrities such as Selena Gomez and Lady Gaga using the iPhone to film a music video that would have traditionally been filmed with a professional camera while spending tens of thousands of dollars (Sunam, 2020). The campaign focuses on simplicity and high quality, creating authenticity while being coherent with the brand image. To analyse the success of the campaign we will use the AIDA model.

The AIDA model is useful in assessing the reason behind consumer reaction to an advertisement or ad campaign.



The AIDA model is an acronym that models the thought processes that a potential customer experiences when deciding whether to make a purchase. The concept was introduced by Elias St. Elmo Lewis in 1898 as he stated that successful advertising should always follow the AIDA formula, The acronym stands for Awareness or Attention, interest, desire and action (Sellers, 2021).

Attention: The campaign initially captured attention through visually stunning and diverse photographs taken by iPhone users. These images were widely shared on social media platforms, billboards, and in print advertisements, ensuring the greatest possible exposure. Apple carefully selected high-quality images that demonstrated the capabilities of the iPhone camera and would stimulate the emotional response and investment of the audience. The audience's fascination with the advertisement was immediately sparked by its attention to detail and appealing visuals. the campaign does not remain stagnant and showcases the features of the camera of each new model, such as night mode or increased water resistance. The iPhone is one of the most prevalent cameras in the world, with millions of users capturing photos daily. This extensive use guaranteed a vast pool of potential attention for the campaign as many users would participate and the company is a well-known household name.



Interest: The campaign maintained interest by presenting a wide variety of images, each telling a unique, true and authentic story. These photographs captured diverse narratives, ranging from everyday moments to extraordinary scenes, keeping viewers engaged and interested in exploring more. Apple curated a collection of photographs that spanned different genres, including portraits, landscapes, action shots, and macro photography. Over time, interest was maintained and a broad demographic found pleasure in this variety. The campaign utilised a range of media,

such as print ads, billboards, and social media, to reach a large audience and maintain interest. The campaign was kept pertinent and relevant by the constant supply of attractive photos that became available as people submitted them continuously.

Desire: The campaign created a desire by associating the iPhone with the ability to capture meaningful, high-quality moments, such as parents swimming with their toddlers for the very first time. Through the iPhone camera's creative potential, Apple devised a product that inspired people to express themselves through photography. Apple purposefully positioned the iPhone camera as a tool for creativity and self-expression to appeal to customers who value cutting-edge technology and artistic expression. The iPhone camera's ease of use and adaptability were emphasised in the campaign, making it appealing to both creative professionals and amateur photographers. The iPhone was touted as a device that enhances photography skills and encourages users to believe that their images are worthy of being displayed in metropolitan areas with thousands of viewers each day.

Action: The call-to-action to share photos with the hashtag #ShotoniPhone encouraged user participation and engagement, as the hashtag became a trend. Apple successfully facilitated the transformation of users into contributors, enabling them to exhibit their photographic abilities and integrate into a broader community. User-generated content amplified the reach of the campaign and reinforced the desire for the product among peers and followers. This social proof was essential in spurring action and influencing decisions regarding purchases. Potential buyers can see from the user content that those who have already bought the phone are extremely pleased with their decision, which may encourage them to do the same. Furthermore, Apple included the campaign throughout its online and physical stores, making it simple for interested parties to learn more about the iPhone and make a purchase. This seamless transition from awareness to action further contributed to the campaign's success.

Looking back, the "Shot on iPhone" campaign's remarkable success can be attributed to more than just its visual appeal—rather, it was a brilliant use of the AIDA model, which helped customers navigate the complex path from attention to action. By harnessing the emotive power of storytelling, the campaign not only showcased the technical

prowess of the iPhone camera but also forged a profound emotional connection with audiences worldwide, culminating in a resounding testament to the enduring impact of strategic marketing ingenuity. the "Shot on iPhone" campaign masterfully moved through every phase of the AIDA model, from drawing in viewers with eye-catching imagery to retaining them with a variety of storylines. It was successful in generating interest in the iPhone camera as a creative tool, leading to user action.

Evaluation of Storytelling in Branding and Marketing Material

It remains evident that storytelling serves as a potent tool for establishing emotional connections with the target audience. Through utilising the psychological elements of storytelling, brands are able to arouse strong feelings in their audience that connect profoundly. Effective storytelling aims to sympathise with the audience's struggles and goals, portraying the business as a helpful friend rather than just a vendor of goods or services, in contrast to billboards that may take advantage of fears. Abstract language engages our language centres, but descriptive storytelling ignites our sensory cortex, making us feel the narrative. Furthermore, storytelling's capacity to activate several brain regions, elicit empathy and improve memorability is highlighted by the scientific explanation of its effects on the brain. Our bodies release oxytocin when we hear stories and feel empathy for others. It's referred to as the "bonding hormone," and the emotions it evokes urge us to take action. This engagement fosters a sense of immersion and empathy, allowing customers to see themselves in the narrative and connect with the brand on an emotional level. Emotional connections allow consumers to decide to purchase a product regardless of the price quality or convenience as 90 to 95% of our decisions and behaviours are constantly being shaped non-consciously by the emotional brain (Shiv and Abrahams, 2020). Overall, storytelling is a powerful tool for forging authentic emotional connections with customers, laying the foundation for long-term relationships and brand advocacy.

That being said, in the ever-evolving landscape of storytelling, maintaining authenticity poses significant challenges, particularly amidst shifting market dynamics. Entrepreneurs face challenges in maintaining authenticity as they strike a balance between imparting important information and engaging the imagination of their audience. The temptation to overshare in an attempt to impress stakeholders is one concern. There is a thin line between presenting the audience with all the information they need and bombarding them with it in an age where transparency is highly valued. Furthermore, there's a tendency to modify storylines to suit prevalent trends as consumer preferences change quickly, jeopardising the integrity of the brand's story. Moreover, the misconception surrounding storytelling in marketing exacerbates the authenticity dilemma. While attempting to apply storytelling strategies, companies could inadvertently put their brand narrative above the user experience, which could result in a disconnect with the audience's needs and aspirations. Essentially, the difficulties with authenticity in storytelling arise from the necessity of maintaining a careful equilibrium between transparency, relevance, and user-centricity in the face of continuously changing market circumstances. Only by navigating these challenges with integrity can entrepreneurs cultivate authentic narratives that resonate deeply with their audience.

Conclusion

The evolution of marketing from its earliest forms to contemporary strategies underscores the importance of emotional connections and storytelling in engaging consumers and fostering brand loyalty. Since Marc Gobé pioneered the notion of emotional branding, which prioritised personal connections over practical features, modern marketers have increasingly recognised the significance of emotions in shaping consumer behaviour. Storytelling is a powerful tool for communicating relatable narratives that resonate with consumers, elevating purchases into acts of support. It involves creating an immersive experience that engages all five senses, using specific symbols, colours, and numbers to elicit desired emotions and a trusted brand image.

Emotional marketing and storytelling provide effective tools for multinational brands to engage with their audiences on a deeper level, resulting in not only short-term sales but also long-term brand advocacy and loyalty. The "Shot on iPhone" campaign serves as a compelling case study, demonstrating how Apple effectively leveraged user-generated content and the AIDA model to capture attention, maintain interest, stimulate desire, and prompt action among consumers. By displaying real-life stories and experiences shot through the lens of their devices, Apple not only demonstrated the advanced capabilities of its products but also induced a sense of community and pride among customers.

That being said, as with any marketing strategy, issues such as maintaining authenticity, misinterpretation, and utilising the correct marketing channel remain. To guarantee that their tales are authentic, brands must achieve a balance between transparency, engagement, and user-centricity.

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