Emotional Identity

Enhancing Customer Experience Through Emotional Involvement

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This paper explains the concept of Emotional Identity. Emotional Identity is related to products and services in the premium sector of consumer markets of industrialised countries. This identity is derived from the reciprocal communication process between customer, product and producer. Taking Karl Marx' analysis of capitalistic societies into account and employing the theories of George Herbert Mead and Axel Honneth, a theoretical definition of product identity will be developed. Within this concept, purchase decisions are analysed with respect to the implicit and unconscious mechanisms leading to intense customer experiences. Thereafter, insights into the analysis are merged into a concept of marketing as reciprocal communication with respect to cultural codes. It is outlined how companies should establish and communicate an authentic emotional identity to derive a competitive advantage and increase sales figures. To conclude, the cultural, psychological and economic limitations of the concept of Emotional Identity are discussed, and its impacts on modern marketing, advertising and sales are outlined.

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1. *Introduction*

Since the Industrial Revolution and especially since World War Two, globalisation has led to immense possibilities for trading products and services. Due to growing net incomes, increasing standards of living and progressing individualisation, the demand for customer-oriented services and made-to-measure consumer products has vastly increased and has become a highly profitable global opportunity for companies. The high-tech services and products we consider subjects of an "Emotional Identity" (EID) are developing at a fast pace and threaten the old-fashioned way of doing profitable business, which simply scaled supply-chain costs and sales figures. They even threaten to make firms that have been outperforming others over decades disappear overnight. But since these high-end goods are priced well above their utility value, there is huge revenue to be gained when applying the findings of EID within this dog-eat-dog, ever-changing world of consumer goods. To define EID, a theoretical approach to the term will be developed and implications and practical advice will be given that show how those findings can be applied to management decisions. In order to be able to define EID, it will first be necessary to take a more detailed look at the definition of the term identity. In the course of this inquiry, one needs to be concerned with three crucial questions:

1. How is reality perceived, i.e. which ontological approach underlies human perception? Do individuals experience the world as unaffectionate observers or affectionate participants, and how do they perceive subjects and objects in interaction processes?
2. Is there any fundamental difference between subjects and objects, i.e. does one have reason to hold on to the "Subject-Object-Dualism" of modern philosophy? How does this influence the way one perceives products and their EID?
3. How does identity emerge or develop? Is it a genuine feature of humankind? Do individuals acquire it through interaction and communication?

In part two of this article, those questions will be answered in order to lay the theoretical groundwork for this paper. To this end, a descriptive theory is developed, explaining how purchase decisions depend on the emotionally perceived performance of product, brand and company. It will be shown that products (as objects) should no longer be viewed as categorically different from subjects, since they have an EID and are therefore, according to the latest findings of social

behaviourism, important parts of the customer's identity. EID is understood as the unique selling proposition of a product, which the customer treats as if it had an identity in order to meet his emotional needs and fill emotional gaps. This identity emerges from the on-going communication process between the customer, the product and the company with the implicit goal of creating a joint emotional value. Part three of this paper will present practical implications of the theoretical thoughts presented in part two. It will apply the conclusions of part two to the relationships between consumers, products and companies. We will analyse the emotional components constituting EID that lead to longstanding positive customer experiences, which, in turn, creates significantly higher margins. For this purpose, the latter section of part three will focus on practical advice necessary to establish an EID. To explicate a concept of emotional branding, we will explain how an EID can be developed and supported by the company in an on-going exchange with their customers. Finally, in the fourth part, there will be a critical discussion about the constraints of this model from cultural, theoretical and operational perspectives.

2.   A Theoretical Approach to Identity in Social Philosophy and Sociology

2.1 The Ontological Approach

Simultaneously with the increase in labour division, specialisation and globalisation during the last century, customer behaviour has fundamentally changed. This shift in brand perception is the crucial hypothesis underlying this article. To substantiate this hypothesis and to lay the ground-work for further analysis, one has to take a look at the history of the relations between products, producers and consumers in capitalistic societies during the 20th and 21st century. Karl Marx took a sociological and philosophical approach to this relation in his work "Capital". Here, Marx pointed out that the Industrial Revolution and the overall turnaround of methods of production and consumption had led to a shift in the common understanding of labour (cf. Marx 1983: 85). Moreover, Marx stated that due to the expansion of capitalism, accompanied by the division of labour, prices had become completely detached from the production process. Since the workers who are consumers at the same time, were no longer able to identify the real utility value of a product, they were easily forced to pay fictional prices on capitalistic markets. Retrospectively, consumers justify the exaggerated prices with all social variables that might have occurred in the

process of producing and exchanging the product. With such rather abstract prices, the economic paradigm of rationality to maximise profits became increasingly important. Being transferred from the exchange of products to the exchange of favours, the paradigm even started to invade people's private lives as they started to view all their social relations according to their exchange value (cf. Lukács 1968: 276).

Marx claimed that capitalism and the monetised exchange of goods had tremendously changed the way human beings interact[1] and the way they relate to the subjects and objects constituting their environment (cf. Marx 1983: 85). According to Marx, they had started viewing and treating the subjects surrounding them as mere objects, a change of perception called reification. When conceived as an object, everything and everyone could be viewed as an investment or good with a certain usability and exchange value. This process has been outlined not only in Marxian theory but also in various other theories which developed during the first half of the 20th century.[2] Some authors claim that, due to this process, people miss out on the genuine value of interaction and tend to become cold, unaffectionate and calculating observers (cf. Lukács 1968: 257). However, the interpretation of the process of reification largely depends on the ontological approach taken by the observer and the above-mentioned conclusion is not undisputed.

Since there are several different ontological approaches that try to explain how humans perceive their environment, their fellow beings and objects, this question should not be taken lightly. Most economic approaches claim that humans perceive the world in a purely rational way, interacting with everything around them in an unaffectionate manner. However, it is far more likely that people look at the world not as neutral observers but as affected participants, interested in the world and driven by an emotional need to interact (cf. Honneth 2005: 36; cf. Habermas 1984: 353). According to Axel Honneth, who models his term of "Anerkennung", German for acknowledgement (Honneth 2005: 41) in analogy to Heidegger's "Sorge", German for concern[3] (Heidegger 1967: 57), humans are naturally concerned with their interactions with their environment, as it are these interactions that allow them to form an identity[4]. Seeing the world as a network of identity-generating interaction

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1   For further reading about Marxian theory and especially the commodity fetishism whereupon the concept of reification relies, the authors recommend (Lohmann 1991: Section. 5).

2   The term reification appears in works of G. Lukács, J. Dewey and M. Heidegger. Scholars of the critical school have used similar concepts relying on the sociological approach of the Marxian theory; for further reading: M. Horkheimer, T. W. Adorno & J. Habermas.

3   For further reading, compare also Dreyfuss 1991: Section. 4

4   In Theories of Social Behaviourism, interaction is regarded as the essential process of identity development. Compare Section. 2.2.

processes about which they care, humans are surely neither cold nor unaffectionate nor calculating, but affected, affectionate participants driven by the strong emotional need to interact.

Since objects as well as subjects are part of the interaction process by which humans experience the world and themselves, a rigorous differentiation between the two categories is no longer appropriate (cf. Honneth 2005: 41). There is no reason to uphold the Subject-Object-Dualism of modern philosophy any longer. Objects and subjects are part of the same category of entities humans interact with. To the individual, the environment occurs as a set of practical relations. For example, the way a Porsche is driven is just as much a form of interaction between the driver and the world – in terms of revealing his attitude towards the world – as a chat between the driver and his colleague would be. For the individual interacting with the world through driving and communication, these two actions are not categorically different but are both interactions with entities that are part of his environment. As interactions with the surrounding entities are crucial for his identity, he will be genuinely concerned with them. Therefore, under the ontological premise that the world is accessible to the individual in the light of its practical significance, there is no categorical difference between subjects and objects (cf. Honneth 2005: 40ff.).

How do these findings influence the way one perceives products and their EID? Having abandoned the Subject-Object-Dualism, it can be assumed that interaction processes between products and customers are analogous to interaction processes between human beings. Therefore, many emotional features of interpersonal relations can now be applied to consumer-product-relations. These findings also open up a whole range of new vistas on how brands' and products' emotional identity can be created in order to satisfy customers' desires.

Concerning the problem of reification, one needs to question whether the expanding capitalistic rationale really influences humans to such an extent that they become completely unaffectionate, as claimed by Marx and Lukács (cf. Honneth 2005: 19ff.). Taking the Marxian hypothesis that capitalism and the exchange logics have influenced the relationship between the customer (subject) and the product (object) (cf. Marx 1983: 80ff.) for granted, the conclusions we draw from it concerning the degree and the manner of its influence of people's reactions still depend on our ontological approach. Assuming that humans generally have an affectionate and genuinely interested disposition towards the world, the notion of individuals becoming unaffected, calculating agents is rather implausible. Individuals do internalise the rational exchange paradigm but when applying it to their social interactions, they use it to optimise all their relationships (to subjects and objects equally) with respect to emotional and affective satisfaction. As the capitalistic paradigm

of maximising exchange value is linked to a genuinely interested and affectionate approach to the world, the degree to which people treat objects in an emotional way increases.

We have now answered question one and two raised in the introduction. The shift in the relation between products (objects) and consumers (subjects) is due to the individuals' transfer of the paradigm of economic rationality to their private life. But instead of becoming unaffectionate and calculating in their relationships with subjects, the more individuals tend to become more affectionate in their relationships with objects, e.g. products, the more they act in accordance with the rational paradigm of economic exchange throughout all their relations and interactions. They develop their identity by means of their interactions with both subjects and objects and therefore, many emotional features of interpersonal relations can now be applied to consumer-product-relations. Now we can take a closer look at the third question and analyse how exactly identity emerges. This is an important step in being able to explain how products can have an EID. Customers value products not just in a rational way, by defining their value as the sum of their single components, but also an unconscious, emotional way, influenced by their perception of the product's design, smell and taste. Depending on their upbringing and socialisation, customers try to fit products into their social schemes and communicate their way of living and even their moral beliefs through them. To derive a complete picture of EID, we will take a closer look at the processes of perception and socialisation as factors involved in the emergence of identity.

2.2 Symbolic Interaction, Acknowledgement and Identity

There are various concepts in philosophy, psychology and sociology to define identity. All these concepts describe the emergence of identity from different points of view and with different emphasis on the individual and its social environment, i.e. the subjects and objects it interacts with. Due to the process of reification and the ontological approach that sees interactions between subjects and objects as similar to interactions between subjects, consumers' interaction with products (objects) can contain just as many emotions as those with humans (subjects). Therefore, we can assume that a product's identity, in analogy to an individual's identity, is created through the consumers' interactions with the product (cf. Dewey 2003: 117). We will hence present insights from Social Behaviourism according to George Herbert Mead and John Dewey. They show that identity is neither a stable entity nor is its existence an a priori, but instead is defined, created and revised constantly through acts of communication and anticipation.

"Inner consciousness is socially organised by the importation of the social organisation of the outer world" (Mead 1912: 406). According to Mead, identity is built on a reflective mind, which arises through the individual's ability to speak and to take on roles. The first part of his theory is devoted to language as the ability to pose vocal gestures towards other individuals so that those individuals perceive them in the way the speaker intends. To give an example, when shouting "Stop!" towards someone on the street, the person addressed is very likely to actually stop on his way, just as the one shouting intends him to, because the meaning of "stop" is closely correlated to the concept of slowing down for all individuals in this society.

> "The critical importance of language in the development of human experience lies
> in this fact that the stimulus is one that can react upon the speaking individual
> as it reacts upon the other" (Mead 1934: 69).

As individuals grow up, they become aware of this reflexive power of language and start to take over roles in simple forms of role-playing games, e.g. little girls play mother and child with their dolls very early on. Thereby, they do not only anticipate their role, but also the expectations of the corresponding partner. Mead defines the process of identity building as a process of "symbolic interaction" between one person and a property of his called the "generalised other" (Mead 1934). This property is acquired through the above-mentioned role-playing games as well as team sports during which individuals are required to learn how to anticipate not only the responses of specific others, but also the behaviour associated with each of the positions on the field. These responses and behaviours are then internalised, and individuals come to view their own behaviour from the perspective of a system of organised actions and expectations as a whole, i.e. the "generalised other". This generalised other consists of the following characteristics: emotional allocation, permanent interaction and an imbalance of power, all of which are essential characteristics of objects, e.g. products as well.

> "The organised community or social group which gives to the individual his
> unity of self may be called 'the generalised other'. The attitude of the generalised
> other is the attitude of the whole community. Thus, for example, in the case
> of such a social group as a ball team, the team is the generalised other in so far

as it enters—as an organised process or social activity—into the experience of
any one of the individual members of it" (Mead 1934: 154).

The individuals' capability to themselves from the perspective of the generalised other is the most important feature of Mead's analysis. Along with the reflective ability of speaking, it is the major capability enabling individuals to build an identity that is unique as well as social as in playing along with the rules of society, the expectations of the other individuals and their reflective interpretations of the latter.

Let us now apply these results to the customer-product-relation in order to better understand their impact on the concept of EID: Of course, products can neither talk nor can they take over roles or reflect the abstract interpretations of a social surrounding, i.e. consider a generalised other. But one should take into account that according to Mead, human beings, when coming to an individual's attention for the first time, are in the beginning perceived as objects and are attributed with an identity by the observing individual's mind only when they interact with him or other individuals. Taking into account the ontological approach outlined in section 2.1 annihilating the Subject-Object-Dualism, one needs to acknowledge that, in their manners of communicating and interacting, many objects and products actually meet the criterion of the generalised other and support the customer's perception. Therefore, one could imagine that products can go through a similar process of identity development as subjects. In practice, the interaction processes concerning products are carried out by the respective company. However, as the consumer attributes them to the product, he is unable to distinguish between the product's and the company's identity. This phenomenon is due to the on-going process of alienation between producer, product and consumer and is further intensified by the accelerating international division of labour as well as by extensive marketing and cultural branding. The consumer attributes all communicational aspects which in some way or the other refer to the product, i.e. the properties perceived by the senses, as well as those connected to the company and the brand, i.e. advertisement, CSR, social networking, etc., to the product. From the consumer's perspective, his perception of the product is the result of direct communication between himself and the product (the company's perspective will be outlined in part three). Individuals even tend to expand the bonds of social interaction to such extent that they no longer confuse social relationships with exchanging processes, but vice versa: they identify with the products they interact with. This phenomenon is called an anthropomorphic fallacy and emerged from the alienation process of the Industrial Revolution, which caused the reification

described earlier. This process has developed to a point at which people name their cars and tend to confuse the generalised other (in Mead's theory, only persons or groups can form a generalised other) with the communication paths used in interactions with companies and their products. To summarise, people confuse the possession of things and their exchange with their "anthropogenic interactions". Products, therefore, get mistaken for a form of interacting subject and becomes humanised. As Mead put it: "We see the objects as we will handle them" (Mead 1938: 104).

The theory of symbolic interaction provides the ability to point out the importance of communication, language and interaction, whereas it is not able to give satisfactory reason why the concept of intersubjectivity should be limited to human beings (cf. Lüdtke 2010; Knorr-Cetina 1998). Instead, one can have intense relationships fulfilling all criteria of a symbolic interaction with animals and objects as well. Recently, Bruno Latour has made a point of demanding that scientists overcome the Subject-Object-Dualism and handle objects and subjects equally (cf. Latour 1988; 2005), especially in cases where the correlation between the product and the consumer is so close and the web-based abilities of interaction are so dense that astonishing parallels between the daily communication with products and with other individuals can be found. Therefore, under the premises we have outlined in section 2.1, one can consider objects to have some form of identity as long as the customers interact with them by using the pattern of the generalised other.

2.3 Identity, Emotions and the Significance of the Unconscious

Since this article's goal is to help companies creating a product one can equip with an EID, we now need to make the step from theory to praxis. What role can emotions play in people's identity and what role do emotions play when it comes to brand perception and sales figures? According to Freud's modern psychology and additionally supported by neuroscientists and neuroeconomists, the impact of the rational part of our decision making process, something Freud called "I" or "me", is greatly overrated and most of our decisions are based on simple atavistic behaviours (cf. Damásio 1995: 40ff.) which rely on basic emotional and unconscious mechanisms, called "it" or "id" (Freud 1989: Bd. 3).[5] The constant fight against those emotional and unconscious mechanisms shapes the rational part of the individual's identity as it tries to play along with the rules of society, state and economy. The individual usually tries to satisfy its emotional needs without acting against

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5   For further reading and recent research compare (2010).

the rules or morals it grew up with. One of the few ways to do so is to try and fulfil these needs in the compensatory world of consumerism by purchasing goods, because when making a purchase, the greatest part of the decision making process relies on those implicit emotional mechanisms, and as purchase is morally unobjectionable, it is a safe way of satisfying those needs without the risk of breaking the rules. As those emotional needs and mechanisms seem to have an enormous implicit power on purchase decisions, the analysis of those underlying aspects of decision making has to be the first step in the process of creating an EID in practice.

3. *Practical Implications on Branding and Strategic Management*

3.1 *The Emotional and the Unconscious*

Before we can understand products as subjects, we need to understand what differentiates products from other objects. If consumers interact with objects which they already own, they no longer perceive them as products. On the other hand, one recognises objects as products if one potentially desires to own them. This expatiates the premise for the expression 'product'. For example, if one likes apples but not oranges, and one finds oneself in front of a market stand which sells apples and oranges, one will perceive the apples as products, as one potentially desires to buy them, whereas the oranges are perceived as mere objects. Since the stand will probably offer a whole range of apples, the customer needs to choose a specific type of apple. As almost any product is nowadays offered in various versions, the customer is constantly confronted with choice. Thus, a closer look at the way he chooses and on the reason underlying his desire to own seems to be essential.

The most obvious reasons for purchase decisions are physical needs like hunger and thirst. Although consumers in industrialised countries can easily satisfy these physical needs on their local markets, the analysis of this kind of needs can serve as an analogy to describe the fulfilment of more sophisticated goals. To exemplify this: One needs a car to get from A to B, a clock to be aware of time and a computer to have access to the Internet. These kinds of goals are called explicit goals. But when thinking about a car, people do not just decide whether to purchase any car, but rather they choose to purchase a specific one. Customers do not make this choice randomly: There are underlying aspects they may not be aware of, but which influence their choices. Neuropsychologists call these implicit goals or unconscious goals. In situations of concrete purchase decision,

the explicit goals constitute patterns of awareness, which preselect the range of desirable products. The fulfilment of explicit goals is recognised through the senses via culturally imprinted signals. This imprinting is formed by infantile experience. Until the age of seven, children acquire a basic understanding of the culture surrounding them, its language, social institutions and interactions. Each time children are confronted with an object, this experience forms the mental representation, visual images, mental constructs and social settings they will associate with this type of objects throughout their lives (cf. Williams/Huang/Bargh 2009). For example: In countries whose cuisine traditionally contains pudding, people know that they can eat pudding because they recognise the pudding from its visual appearance. The perception of an object leads the consumer to the relevance this object has for him. If a person only had the explicit goal to eat pudding, he would simply pick any random pudding.

After pre-selection, the implicit goals allow for an efficient final selection among the remaining products. Similar to the process described above, the fulfilment of implicit goals is recognised through the senses via cultural signals imprinted until the age of seven. Additional implicit goals are influenced or newly formed by the individual's experience within his peer groups throughout his or her life. Presumably, exposure to a person partly activates the goals these individuals value. For example, after reflecting upon someone in their lives – a best friend, parent, and so forth –, individuals are more likely to unconsciously pursue goals they associate with this person (cf. Fitzsimons/Bargh 2003). Using the pudding example, a more detailed look at the neuropsychological process underlying implicit goals can be taken. It has been proven that, as the brain uses the same parts to evaluate physical and psychological situations, the perception of physical and psychological characteristics are closely related (cf. Ijsermann/Semin 2009). The exemplary pudding is perceived to be nutritious both in a physical and psychological sense by someone who grew up in a family where pudding was served as comfort food. As one unconsciously associates its high nutritious value with maternal care, creamy pudding is chosen as comfort food and 'mood-brightener'. Moreover, the psychological and physical connections and their influence on implicit needs are not a one-way-street, but could on the contrary be compared to a Newton's cradle. As people associate warm drinks with social warmth, the partaking of warm drinks leads to more social warmth and vice versa; social warmth activates a desire to partake warm drinks (cf. Zhong/Leonardelli 2008). The scope of these findings is very large and they have far reaching consequences for companies concerning the fulfilment of explicit and implicit goals through products. Since customers are not consciously aware of their implicit goals, companies cannot find out about their customers'

implicit goals through classical customer surveys. Instead, they need a indepth understanding of the cultural codes related to their products, as it is cultural codes which allow for the matching of the products' features and the customer's implicit goals. The main signals products send to the customer need to match the customers' implicit goals. Credibility and trustworthiness of a company depend on whether the perceived performance of its product matches the ascribed promise to fulfil their implicit goals.

3.2 How to Create an EID

The EID of a product is traditionally formed by the brand's identity which consists of many different factors, including the public image of the company, the pictures the advertisements use for its products, and the perception of the social groups known to use or consume the product. The consumer associates the identity of the company with the brand, constructing something referred to as brand identity. Traditionally, companies have tried to manage their brand identity in a top to bottom style, resembling the way regimes use ideologies. Their marketing branch constructs a brand identity, then tries to convince the customer of it and seeks to prevent any interpretation of the brand other than its own. It tries to maintain the sovereignty of interpretation and avoids any outside influence through stakeholders. The company's role in a traditional marketing context is the role of a chief ideologist who defines the brand identity with its correct interpretation, and who chooses the brand's friends and picks its enemies. In the age of non-authoritarian beliefs, consumer empowerment and social media, consumers no longer accept being treated as if they were intellectually incapable. They demand to be taken seriously and treated as mature and intellectually capable beings who are free to express their opinion publicly on whatever subject they please. The buzz which emerged around a documentary produced by German public television (ARD and ZDF) about the WWF's purported cooperation with corporations like Monsanto[6] as well as the scandal which arose around Nestlé's usage of palm oil demonstrates the extent of this phenomenon. In both cases, the outrage spread via social media such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook simultaneously and aggravated in the blogosphere. WWF reacted by employing a task-force of bloggers in an attempt to pour oil on troubled water, but instead, their "staged" blog posts exacerbated the outrage. A large number of WWF members quit their memberships. The

6   For further reading: http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/der_pakt_mit_dem_panda (accessed: 10.01.2014).

WWF took the makers of the documentary to court. Finally, the WWF published an extensive counterstatement[7] addressing all allegations raised in the documentary and producing numerous witnesses and proof restoring its credibility as far as possible. Nestlé, on the other hand, was confronted with a drastic clip highlighting the use of palm oil, some of which is produced on plantations which have been erected on territory which used to be part of the rainforest which is home to the last orang-utans. Nestlé had YouTube remove the viral clip, which depicted an office worker eating a KitKat chocolate bar that turned out to be an orang-utan finger with blood spilling over his desk. The attempt to protect its brand from damage resulted in a contrary effect: more copies of the video were added by several users in protest of the perceived censorship. Moreover, the company's attempt to prevent access to the video exasperated users and media reactions alike, drawing even more attention to the video.

In order to gain and keep consumers' recognition and sympathy, companies need to refrain from such paternalistic behaviour as "top-down marketing style" but should adopt participative marketing strategies and practices. Companies employing participative marketing strategies stop holding on to the sovereignty of brand interpretation. Instead, they encourage their stakeholders to participate collectively in the on-going process of identity construction implying the brand as well as the product. These collective processes resemble the emergence of cultures rather than ideologies. The company's role in these new marketing processes is the one of a host and moderator: initiating the communication process by setting the topic (advertisement), providing the platform where the interaction is supposed to take place (e.g. social media platform), inviting everyone to join the conversation about brand and product, answering questions (on the product, production process) and reconciling conflicts. The advertisement merely serves as an invitation, drawing the customer's attention to the product or brand. As he engages actively in the process, constructing the brand identity and therefore interacting voluntarily with the company, the so-called IKEA effect comes into play:

> "Labor enhances affection for its results. When people construct products
> themselves, from bookshelves to Build-a-Bears, they come to overvalue their
> (often poorly made) creations. This phenomenon is called the IKEA effect, in

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7   For further reading http://www.wwf.de/themen/huismann-kritik-pakt-mit-dem-panda-faktencheck/der-pakt-mit-dem-panda-im-faktencheck/ (accessed: 10.01.2014).

honor of the wildly successful Swedish manufacturer whose products typically
arrive with some assembly required" (Norton 2009: 30).

As the consumer participates in the construction of the brand identity, one can assume that he develops some kind of sympathy for the brand as it becomes partly his own creation. He attributes it with his own implicit emotional desires and unconsciously sets his hopes in the company's products to be able to fulfil them later. An (admittedly extensive) example is the Facebook-App called "unserAller", which provides an interface for companies to hand over the complete product development for a single product to the customers. UnserAller organises the product development as a participative and democratic process. During each phase of product development, the participants can first make suggestions and in a second step vote for their favourite suggestion. Every company using this application needs to commit itself to producing the product exactly as it was created by the participants. Though only a few months old, unserAller can already look back on quite a few successes including a shower gel developed for the drugstore chain dm, a chocolate bar for Rittersport and a series of different mustard dips for the small mustard manufacturer Senf Mari[8].

3.3 Communicating an EID

If a company wants to communicate the authentic EID of a product it has to acknowledge that this is not just the subsequent process of introducing the identity to the customer, but an essential part of the identity building itself. It has been pointed out that the process of identity building cannot be based on technical features or any sensorial impression of the product alone, but has to be based on interaction. Therefore, interaction and communication have become a heterogeneous process and need to be understood as a form of interactive dialogue between company, product and customer. This process requires an explicit discussion of the Corporate Identity (CI) as well as the ability to perceive and analyse the expectations of the customers and their social surroundings. It also includes the process of identifying and influencing the customer's implicit goals to match them with the corporate goals and of course the product identity.

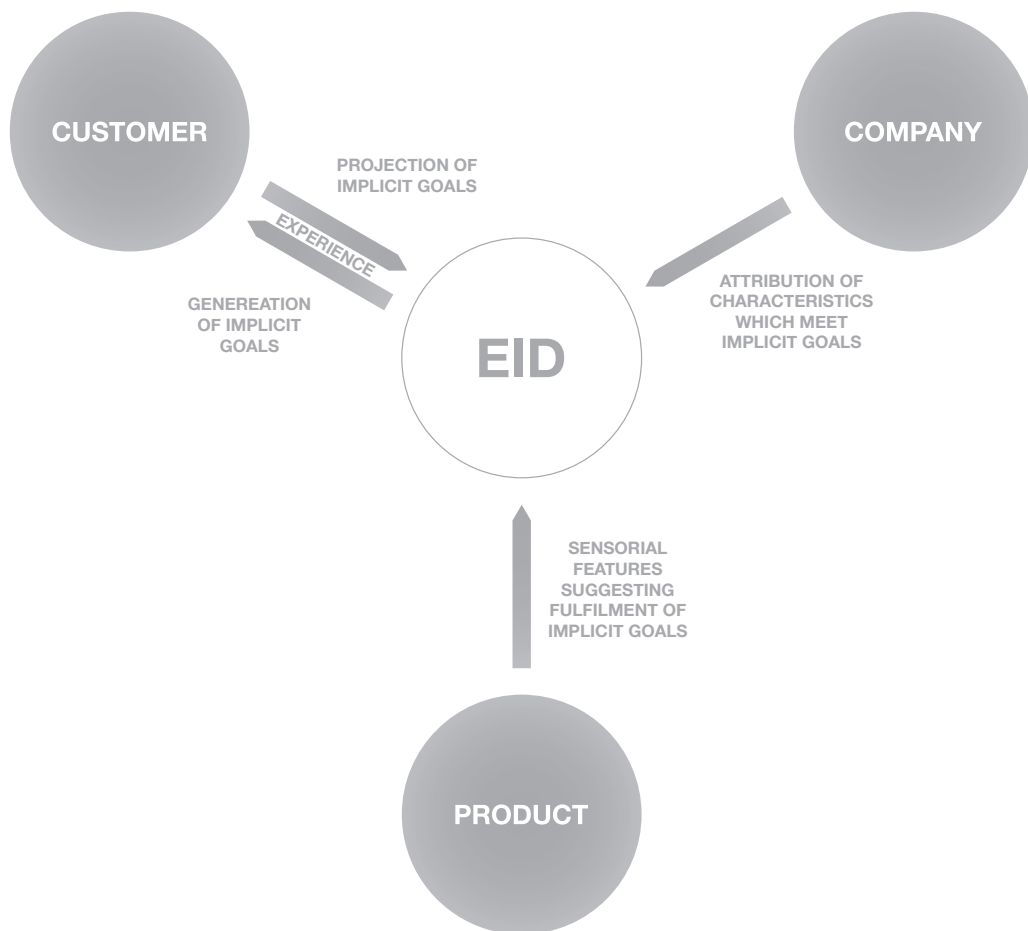8   For further reading: http://www.unseraller.de/ (accessed: 10.01.2014).

FIGURE 1: EMOTIONAL IDENTITY (OWN SOURCE)

Therefore, interaction and communication have become a heterogeneous process and need to be understood as a form of interactive dialogue between company, product and customer. This process requires an explicit discussion of the Corporate Identity (CI) as well as the ability to perceive and

analyse the expectations of the customers and their social surroundings. It also includes the process of identifying and influencing the customer's implicit goals to match them with the corporate goals and of course the product identity.

For companies to put this into practice can be a great challenge. But with the emergence of Web 2.0, most consumers in developed countries now enjoy the ability to interact with companies in real time. Feedback loops have become tighter and the process of identity building has become far more frequent than it was two decades ago. To use those significant improvements in communication, companies have to rethink their communication strategies to be recognised as authentic brands, as pointed out in the previous section. To understand marketing as a process of culture rather than ideology, the corporate identity has to be analysed with respect to hierarchies, organisational processes and communication structures to give rise to an emotional approach to identity building within the company. To communicate the visions and goals, which can lead to a successful hetero-hierarchic communication process between customers and developers, companies will have to rely on the crowd in their company to understand the specific functioning of social networks. Therefore, "Communities of Practice" and "Collaborative Knowledge Networks" are not only a possibility to leverage costs of "Customer Relationship Management" projects (Deloitte 2001: 12) but also an effective way of learning about the inside out communication process and the challenges companies face when trying to "build up" an EID.

4.   *Cultural Boarders and Emotional Identity*

As stated before, the participative development of an EID is understood as a reciprocal one, and is minted by authentic communication and the establishment of a marketing culture rather than an ideological top-down approach. In the sense of truly reciprocal communication, this may even include the loss of sovereignty of interpretation by the company. As long as the customer is involved in the process of shaping the EID during an open discourse, he will always attribute his preferences concerning morality, sustainability and purpose to the product he wants to communicate his identity with which reciprocally becomes part of the product identity. Hence, the process of sociality with products is not only a form of implicit marketing used by companies to shape the customers' identity and their preferences. In cases where the crowd-based reinterpretation of the product identity partly replaces the corporate identity, the EID can even become a Corporate Social

Responsibility instrument rather than another simple marketing tool. Concerning these aspects of implementation, the first point in understanding corporate identity as culture is in a holistic way. Since corporate identity refers to every single unit of the company, the culture has to consistently permeate marketing-related divisions as well as divisions that are not directly customer-related. It is not sufficient to understand the open character of the culture needed to evoke an EID in the sense of communication only. Rather, it is indispensable that an open culture becomes an essential and inherent part of a company's self-perception.

From a practical point of view, there could be unforeseen obstacles concerning the feasibility of a change from an ideological marketing approach to a cultural one. Employing a cultural approach to marketing and handing over parts of the sovereignty of interpretation from its brand to its customers will make it impossible for the company to transfer the EID attributed to their product from one group who co-created it to another one with different cultural backgrounds. More importantly, it has not yet been possible to verify whether the customers' perception of the brand's identity is elastic enough to allow for it to be perceived as authentic despite major changes. Especially the question whether the customers will acquiesce in an obviously radical change or whether they will hold on to their image of the brand as a "seducing selling machine" is yet to be answered. In order to become more popular, gain higher margins, and sell more, the company cannot singlehandedly rely on its ability to develop and communicate a more emotionally involving identity but rather has to gain credibility for its new brand identity by living up to the expectations it creates amongst its customers. Thus, being authentic depends on the customers' perception, not on the company's promise alone.

Furthermore, for a company trying to establish an EID, there is a risk of failure, whose consequences should not be underestimated. In cases in which, from a customer's point of view, the company's pledge to live up to the customers' expectation has not been fulfilled, returning to the old ideological marketing approach and claiming the complete sovereignty of interpretation for its brand seems to be the natural strategy from the company's point of view. In the eyes of the customers, however, a retreat and the drawback to complete sovereignty of interpretation equals a loss of face on the part of the company. Since customers have by then participated in the identity building process and have emotional involved themselves in this process by unconsciously setting their hopes on the brand and products, their reaction will imply their emotional involvement. In such a case, customers will therefore no longer be ready to pay for products, which are provided by companies stepping back from reciprocal communication. Additionally, they will not keep

quiet, but will mock the brand to a point where its reputation will be completely ruined, finally leading to an EID which evokes antipathy instead of sympathy. Although a very radical one, the best strategy in case of such a failure might be to replace the unpopular brand with a completely new one while simultaneously exchanging the management team to create the possibility of a total turn around and restart in culture and communication, instead of refurbishing the existing one, as it has been done unsuccessfully by British Petroleum (BP), just to give one example out of many. BP tried to evoke positive emotions amongst environmentally conscious customers by simply changing their advertising slogan to "Beyond Petroleum". The customer perception of the brand had recently practically hit rock bottom. After several oil spills and averages had ruined the company's image, in 2001 the management decided to change the company's advertising slogan. But since this change was neither backed by significant customer involvement nor accompanied by significant changes in BP's core business, this strategy resulted in the opposite effect. As the supply of non-regenerative energy remained BP's unchallenged core business and no visible steps were taken in the direction of renewable energies indicated by the new slogan, customers, NGOs and the international press made no secret of their disgust about what they felt was BP's direct lie to their faces. Since then, BP has spent millions on renewable energies in order to assure customers of the sincerity of the change of mindset symbolised by their advertising slogan, with almost sero success. Since the oil spills and tank ship damages have beaten them beyond the sero-point of positive reputation, BP has taken much more damage from its unauthentic rebranding campaign as it could possibly have imagined. YouTube videos and blogs are constantly making fun of the company's new advertising slogan and its outdated way of dealing with crises in the media (trying desperately to hold on to the sovereignty of interpretation). In 2008, BP was awarded the "Emerald Paintbrush" award, a satirical prise from Greenpeace UK in order to highlight its alleged green-washing campaign. Meanwhile, poll numbers and customer reputation have dropped far behind those of BP's archrival Shell. The customer and media outrage developed at such a fast pace and with such intensity that even the sum of $4.5 billion BP spent on regenerative energy projects did not save BP from becoming and remaining the company with the worst reputation within the industry. By the end of July 2010, independent BP station owners reported sales down 10 to 40 percent in the quarter after the Gulf oil spill. This example shows that a change of advertising slogan without a change of culture or customer involvement has no positive effect on an EID but may even be harmful. Apparently, when companies try to evoke emotional reactions using the hopes and goals of their customers, it is all or nothing.

In daily business, EID leads to the necessity of social media expertise in companies. The concept of marketing taught at universities so far equates to a one-way-street of putting any ideology out there while for high quality marketing the contrary is true: social media means communication, discourse and answering questions, being aware of critique as well as listening carefully to suggestions for product improvement. It also means opening up the company to customer participation, which is still very unusual among ordinary business. A discussion of the ethical implications of the concept of EID would be apposite but would go beyond the scope of this paper. Questions concerning the ethical aspects of implicit marketing and consumer persuasion should be the subject of further research. To conclude, one can state that the concept of EID is a new and additional approach which cannot replace regular marketing processes. Advertisement still serves as an invitation, drawing the customer's attention to the product and introducing potential desires to the customer. The concept of EID is a powerful tool to influence the customer's desire and the way the customer communicates this desire to a company. Therefore, we hope this concept will help managers to understand actual challenges in customer relationship management as well as the opportunities of social media. We do believe in this new world of direct communication and interaction as the future of branding. We hope that the inspirations drawn in this paper will enable marketing to forge new paths in order to better serve customers' needs and desires.

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