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How the Internet Ate the World!

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How the Internet Ate the World!

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ABSTRACT

We often think of branding in association with products, personalities and organizations. And of course the internet is one of the major tools used to achieve this. The internet and social media have opened up a whole universe of applications. And already the critics are lining up to remind us that there is sinister potential in the monolithic wealth it has created. So much so some believe that this phenomenon is going to devour the world! Our paper looks at this from a number of different perspectives and we believe there is some real potential here to go beyond the usual orthodoxies and consider how it may well be useful. We seldom think of the value of branding in association to concepts like immigration. Whilst we mostly believe that the digital world of the internet is a powerful and useful resource to aid and support many endeavors, we seldom think of how consuming and potentially negative these applications can be.

Keywords

Digital, cyberspace, internet, branding, reframing, repositioning, social media, consuming, monopolies, wealth, counterproductive.

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper was inspired by reading a very interesting article by Jon Henley who interviewed Andrew Keen, otherwise referred to as an internet skeptic. Keen believes the internet is making fools and victims of us all. “This is not, Keen acknowledges a very popular view, especially in Silicon Valley, where he spent the best part of 30 years.” Despite this Keen’s book, “The Internet is Not the Answer” has been remarkably well received. As one Californian venture capitalist has put it “the internet has become “the largest creation of legal wealth in the history of the planet.” Google which now handles 3.5 billion searches daily and controls more than 90% of the market in some countries, including Britain, was valued at 400 billion dollars last year. (Henley, 2015)

Uber, a 5-year old start up employing about 1000 people is described as “software that eats taxis” and was valued last year at more than 18 billion. Mind you this is roughly the same as Avis and Hertz combined. (Henley, 2015)
In Keen’s words, “Google doesn’t just own the post office, it has the right to open every one’s letters.” In a very

persuasively argued interview by Jon Henley with Keen, Google has become the search and information monopoly. Uber the transport monopoly. AIRBNB on the way to becoming the hospitality monopoly, and the list goes on. (Henley, 2015)

Perhaps one of Keen’s most powerful points is that monopolies that are ‘uncontrolled’ have emerged all over the world as a result of the power and reach of the internet. When indeed the whole concept of providing users with vast amounts of information and easy access was the purpose of the engines functionality, or so he thought. Gone are the days of spending a week in the library to find research material – you can find it in 5 minutes on your laptop or phone. Lifestyles changed and so did we. He argues that instead of being the networks users – we are supposed to be its beneficiaries but in many ways we are its victims. Huge monopolies have created an abundance of personal wealth for the owners of these platforms. Consider Mark Zuckerberg, co-founder and CEO of Facebook with a net worth of \$41.2 billion. (Forbes, 2015)
Keen believes we are all supporting nothing more than huge commercial vulgar activity – and in the end it’s all about the money. (Henley, 2015)

EAT OR BE EATEN

Take Carly Fiorina, for example.

The internet machine is working for her and against her. Is she about to be eaten up? Or will the internet machine fuel her success? Particularly her insider knowledge about how to rebrand - after all she has done it before for AT&T and the giant office equipment manufacturer, Hewlett Packard. Once upon a time Carly Fiorina, was the CEO of Hewlett Packard, she is now an official presidential candidate. Andrew Harrer, a writer for Time.com reminds us that she ran unsuccessfully for a republican senate seat from California in 2010. (Mitchell, 2015)

Her outstanding accomplishments include raising through the ranks at AT&T and its spinoff Lucent Technologies and growing H-P’s business to the 11th largest in the world over a 6 year period and she was the first woman CEO to head a fortune 20 company. As part of her presidential platform her website <https://carlyforamerica.com/> notes her “conservative policies that advance economic growth,

entrepreneurship, innovation, and effective leadership” as reason to elect her for president.

It didn't take the internet and others long to retard her successful ascension towards the stars before the board at HP ousted her in 2005. Pundits with hindsight are now graciously suggesting that whoever had been in that post would have faced huge challenges after the tech boom went bust. Fiorina obviously can use opinion like this plus her own masterly skills at rebranding (marketing speak) and reframing (psychology speak) to position herself as a potential “winner” who is very well equipped to be the Commander in Chief of the United States of America. She still has a very long road ahead and it's going to be difficult for her to bury a fact check that keeps popping up, the internet has a huge memory. And in the lists of history's worst CEO's her name is included. (Mitchell, 2015)

And then there's Hillary...

Another prospective presidential candidate – again. To many, she is the only viable female or male democratic candidate. Others might beg to differ – but as expected globalized reportage is ensuring that no good deed goes rewarded. Remember she has served America for many years both as a first lady and as Secretary of State. Clearly an outstanding background and worthy of being regarded as a front runner. But of course we are forgetting about the globalization of reportage through all the usual social media channels not to mention hard print and television. The amount of time being spent examining what appeared at first to be an innocent matter – a mother, a wife and now a grandmother – wanting her own private cell phone – because let's face it, not everything is Americas business, or the worlds business come to that...well at least this is how it used to be.

This email matter could just be perceived as technological naiveté – the sort of mistake your mother could make. In a recent panel discussion on Fox News the focus of attention and analysis was whether or not Hillary could be charged with perjury. With the additional potential crime that she could have revealed state secrets. So an easy method of keeping in touch – email correspondence, is now in some quarters, being treated as “High Crimes and Misdemeanors.”

Can you see any parallels between Fiorina and Hillary? Currently Hillary is being positioned as the keeper of the keys to the middle and working class...pity the Daily Mail online continues to show photographs of the mansion she and Bill have rented in the Hamptons this summer. Last week Vanity Fair reported the Clintons paid 100K for a 2-week rental in the Hamptons. The reportage by the Daily Mail, Britain's largest selling newspaper, echoed the same, noting Hillary paid a mere 50k per week for her holiday in the Hamptons! Is Hillary going to be easy to rebrand? We don't think her championing of the middle and working

classes will cut it. Or is this a good diversion to the email debacle? (Nguyn, 2015)

Both Fiorina and Hillary are past mistresses of being skillful “manipulators” of all media – both soft and hard and both are very skilled communicators with big intellects. Quite a contrast to some of the men on the presidential track. A further point of interest is that the negative campaigns against them are mostly led by men – not that we want to make this a feminist issue. Both Fiorina and Hillary have occupied very powerful positions – bigger than most men on the planet - and yet the very tools that both have used constructively and positively may, in the end, bring one or both of them down – in other words, the internet can gobble them up. Each women's rebranding – Fiorina as the sparkling new leader – and Hillary as the champion for the middle and working classes – how the markets perceive what the internet feeds them is still unclear. Will Fiorina be served as a new interesting desert but with too many calories? Similarly, will Hillary be served as our favorite home cooked meal but perceived as leftovers?

TRADITIONAL MEDIA NOT EATEN YET?

Sometimes we just want to sit back and watch the tube...what a concept. It's good to report that the talking head method of discussion is alive and well although it now has a twin sister on YouTube. For some time there was a whisper among pundits that the talking head approach to using television airtime would quickly go out of fashion or be overwhelmed by the digital world.

In May of this year an interview conducted by Charlie Rose with the photographer Sally Mann was aired on PBS. It was a stunning reminder of the power of the visual and a further reminder that a visual image is worth more than a thousand words. She was a fascinating and articulate interviewee and she reminded us of how photographic images can record an instant moment. For example, she described an incident of a taxi driver fighting with a passenger as three onlookers photographed the moment. This was possible because of the camera function on their cell phones. If there had been no photographs the verbal reportage, after the fact, could have been very different. Technology made this possible and the internet manipulated the reach by broadcasting the incident worldwide and in a nanosecond. Has the fine art of photography been democratized? (Rose, 2015)

Now for Malala...

A perfect example of the globalization of information at its very best...one picture that captured the hearts and minds of the entire world – which was an image of a young girl who had been shot in the head.

A young girl's mission as a blogger was to chronicle the frightful experiences she and her schoolmates and parents endured under the shadow of Taliban rule in her village in Pakistan. “Malala consistently received support and

encouragement in her activism from her parents. The idea for the blog was even that of her father Ziauddin, who ran a local private school.” (bbc.com, 2014)

Malala’s story is exceptional in many ways, not least because at the tender age of 13 she was already blogging and she had the complete support of her parents to find support for all girls to receive an education. Interesting note had she not been a blogger, the Taliban would not have been able to find her – but because she was a blogger her story went viral. The outcome for her, her village and her life mission was monumental – and would not have been possible without her story becoming a global sensation. This was of course due to the accessibility and reach made possible by the internet. Malala’s story went viral, fueled by the internet, people all over the world, young and old responded in one voice, a chorus of support for Malala and her mission.

It could have been a very different story... imagine the incident took place 25 years ago? Malala may have found herself begging for bread at the city center.

In the wrong place at the right time?

This story is an example of how the internet tool of blogging can be used in a positive way, as an outlet for recording ones experiences (a good thing) but also can cause one to fall victim to its power. Sound familiar? To eat and to be eaten.

Malala’s mission is now conflated beyond anything she could have ever dreamed of. Today Malala is a survivor and powerful advocate for women and she is making a difference that would not have been possible without the power of the reach and access of the internet. Her mission was recognized in 2013 when she received a Nobel Prize. Together with her parents Malala continues to do their hitherto unrecognized work which is now known about throughout the world. In fact she has helped inspire several global spin-offs including the “strong girl campaign.” (Kweifio-Okai, 2015)

So far Malala has not been eaten up by the internet, but instead her mission has been fueled by the engine. In reverse order to Carly Fiorina and Hillary Clinton? As Sallie Man, the photographer reminds us, a picture tells a thousand words and had not Malala’s picture after the shooting been posted her story may have gone unnoticed.

CAN THE OLD BECOME NEW?

So does one need to celebrate a 100-year birthday to be repositioned? Or does declining market share and low revenue cause a company to rethink their brands personality? The answer is yes and in Oreos case they had the good sense to bring in a brilliant young media agency: “Draft FCB New York” - what did they do and how did they do it? They threw sacred cows of branding i.e. keep doing what you’re doing because ‘that’s what got you

there’ bravely into the trash. They took note of the “the cluetrain manifesto” which proposed a new branding orthodoxy that it should be a conversation between the consumer and the marketer.” (McCracken, 2012)

This essentially is about an interaction between the consumer and the marketer. A recent television commercial positioned a new look for Oreo as a “Thin” (verses the old ‘thick’). The image of the Oreo was an elegant sophisticated hybrid between Belgian chocolate and a sophisticated cookie – without a child in sight. But as their new branding campaign rolls out, appeals targeting children will not be abandoned.

The brilliance of Oreo’s campaign is that it stays faithful to the metaphor of breathing in (the market) and breathing out (the campaign) – that is an interaction between them and their markets and niftily position that same metaphor as “culture” so that culture is breathed in and out thus giving them the wonderful freedom to use topical, historical and timely events – anything that is significant – for example celebrating Elvis, the Mars landing – all global in reach and appeal.

And they continue to add to this catalogue of global celebrations using images for example of the Liberty Bell. This diversity and variety speaks to a constant need to continue to appeal to one’s market, remain current and fresh – the DNA of the internet fuels this as it is both systemic and cybernetic.

This paradigm shift in marketing is no small change. Oreo’s marketers have managed to capture the art of moving swiftly between old orthodoxy and spanking brand new. And are endlessly filled with surprises – from the simple to the complex. “Sticking with the old branding is the path to irrelevance and tedium...and the effective death of the brand.” (McCracken, 2012)

There isn’t any doubt at all about the success of the rebranding of Oreo. How does this relate to Hillary and Fiorina? Is this an example of an edible product eating the best of the internet before it gets eaten itself?

IT’S A MANS WORLD?

Old spice is a similar rebranding success story, and like Oreo has taken full advantage of ‘the new digital world’ but unlike Oreo have used this in a slightly different way. Their agency, Wieden+Kennedy Portland, used young male sports celebrities to front their campaigns. They turned a perceived weakness into a strength and rebranded their 70 year heritage Old Spice as being “experienced” and well positioned to be an expert on masculinity and being a man. A further significant and key insight that was unearthed was that women were responsible for more than 50% of body wash purchasers. They incorporated social media platform links on their web site and had interesting results including 200K followers on twitter but a staggering 2.5 million on the

brands Facebook page. This tells us about the differentiation between social media platforms and their user markets. (<http://shorebranding.com/2013/07/brand-in-focus-old-spice/>)

An important difference between Oreo and Old Spice is that Old Spice has utilized brand extensions. They moved from an after shave and cologne exclusive business into the deodorant market and then into the body spray and body wash markets.

This has helped extend and grow the brand and its user base. Like Oreo, they utilized market feedback from their social media followers and carefully orchestrated their feedback systems to have a “conversation” – and used this market feedback to tweak and refocus their marketing efforts. (<http://shorebranding.com>)

So two very old, long established historically successful products that looked as though they were about to see their demise in the ‘new’ world – have harnessed the best of this new world and repositioned their products to capture new markets and have global appeal. So far the internet hasn’t eaten them but fed them to keep them alive and well and kicking. Kudos to the marketing teams who orchestrated these rebranding campaigns.

WHATS IMMIGRATION GOT TO DO WITH IT?

When we think branding we think products, personalities and even political figures – but we don’t immediately think of branding in terms of ideas or concepts.

Much is known and has been written about the highly controversial issue of immigration. As might be expected it is a hot topic on the agenda of the political hopefuls leading up to the American Presidential primaries. Immigration is a subject that has been written about and debated for generations, without really moving the conversation too far forward. Today all the same old well-rehearsed controversies and arguments are being laid out on the political table and stateside map. Much of this will be carried through social media channels.

What about rebranding the idea of immigration and positioning it differently? How many politicians for example know of the advances taking place in neuroscience and about epigenetics? Moreover, how much of it is being discussed via social media channels? “The study of epigenetics is a relatively new one that seeks to explore how something in the external environment can, in the words of Rachel Yehuda, an Israeli-born neuroscientist and psychiatrist, “affect the internal environment, and before you know it a gene is functioning in a different way.” It’s about creating and driving non-invasive change like in the form of osmosis. (Cohen, 2015)

Genetics can be transformed by experience of other cultures and other countries, in other words, other environments or contexts. If this is the case, and

politicians embraced this, how much of an impact would this have on how we as a country and as individuals - understand the meaning of immigration to those who are displaced? This is the argument Roger Cohen presents in his memoir “The Girl From Human Street.”

Perhaps this has something to do with some immigrant groups seeking new ways to deal with their *altered states* “in order to feel less foreign.” (Cohen, 2015) Immigrants assimilate better when they experience a sense of belonging. The movement to belong is a “new” characterization or repositioning. Hitherto this issue has been characterized and polarized as the separatist versus the integratist movement. This repositioning or reframe of “belonging” may hold a key to uniting both sides. The application of epigenetics, like ‘Mindfulness’ according to Dr. Ellen Langer, can make one less judgmental of others and therefore more embracing of the differences that often separate us. (Harvard Business Review, 2014)

Perhaps further progress can be made to help the whole cause of immigration and for immigrants to feel more welcomed and therefore make a greater contribution to our society. As nonimmigrants – at least not in this generation, we are only too aware of how touched we are by warm kind welcoming gestures. (Cohen, 2015)

This is a major potential branding and reframing movement - that the vehicle of social media can birth into a global phenomenon. What would happen if we employed the services of Draft FCB New York or Wieden+Kennedy Portland to launch a branding campaign for immigration?

Dr. Ellen Langer reminds us that we all have a tendency to be *mindless* and to, for example pigeonhole people. She goes on to explain that this freezes someone in the way that we have judged them and then we miss the chance to enjoy a relationship with them. Mindfulness, on the other hand helps us to appreciate people. (Harvard Business Review, 2014)

This is another example of an apparently simple idea about very complex matters – and has struck a global cord. Its impact has already influenced many disciplines including health and fitness, leadership and organizational development and the psychotherapies. And is already having a profound impact on people who are referred to as immigrants. So not only is neuroscience offering a new way of thinking about immigration so too does ‘Mindfulness’. One requires laboratory research and the other can make a quick meaningful impact – both are equally important. Dr. Ellen Langer has some very appealing easy to understand tools for her audience to use to begin to understand what Mindfulness is about. A simple way to begin to understand a very complex matter. One of her tactics “is to imagine that your thoughts are totally transparent. If they were, you wouldn’t think awful things about other people. You’d find a way to understand their perspective.”

So on the one hand we have epigenetics, which is complex and profound and on the other we have mindfulness, which is simple but also potentially profound. Both these “new” applications can benefit not just people who immigrate to other countries and continents but to indigenous populations. Both could have a phenomenal impact if marketers like Draft FCB New York and Wieden+Kennedy Portland did pro bono work and pushed these concepts into the digital universe – they certainly have the creativity and skills.

So far there is no evidence that the internet is eating these two phenomenon up but the concept placed in the right hands could catapult these ideas into the universe and could change the way we see immigration and the world around us.

2. CONCLUSION

An interesting point worth noting is Mark Zuckerberg recently “donated \$5 million to a college scholarship fund for undocumented immigrants”. (Forbes, 2015)

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