

# Diversity instead of simplicity



Light and shadow of  
diversity marketing

**Diversity** More and more people in Western societies want politics and business to do more to improve the common good. Companies and brands should also show attitude, stand up for values, commit to a purpose. Quite a few marketers and creatives from agencies are therefore exultantly blowing the same horn to get consumers in the mood for an additional benefit of an inclusive (brand) world: If you want good, if you trumpet good, then somehow good will happen to you!

Sounds like *I had a dream*

- loosely based on Martin Luther King. Or the One World idea,

as it may have been for many people in the West until the outbreak of the Covid pandemic, new East-West confrontations and the global economic crisis. At least in marketing and communication, there are quite a few who hold on to the basic idea of attitude, corporate values and lived diversity of brands as a special added value.

In fact, living democracies promote tolerance and openness towards social change. Diversity is thus a central result of a constantly evolving individualisation. Diversity would then be the epitome of a lively, cosmopolitan and inclusive society, in which diversity and its tolerance would be Push back "ingrained routines" and uniformity.

### The search for meaning

The "meaning of life" plays a major role in numerous philosophies, plays and Monty Python. It is true,

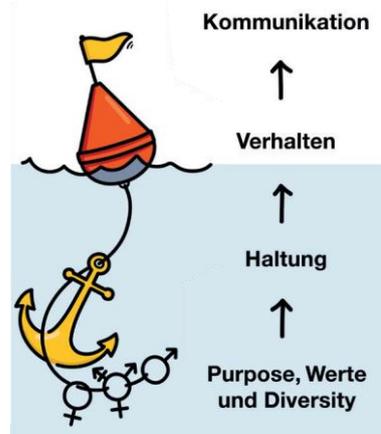
that more and more people agree that companies and brands should contribute to improving the well-being of society. And it is also true that many managers "feel that life is better" when the focus is not only on success, money and commerce, but also on higher-ranking values, according to which the company and the brand should contribute.

we ourselves live or, ideally, an entire company lives (and sets an example for others to follow). Of course, value-based contents are desirable life principles for people. But do they really shape our everyday decisions and our choice of brand?

After Sinek's TED talk in 2009 and his *Start with Why*, a veritable run on corporate visions, meaning-seekers and value attitudes developed. Sinek posed the question of meaning for companies in an impressively simple way: Most market articulators, he said, know what they do in their business, but can do little to adequately define why they do it and how to translate the visionary into the form of a mission statement. Commitment to a purpose, to a better world or to an open society should be the top priority and thus the anchor point for attitude, social behaviour and communication (Fig. 1).

Renowned marketing experts We see the thesis of putting "meaning before economic success" as a

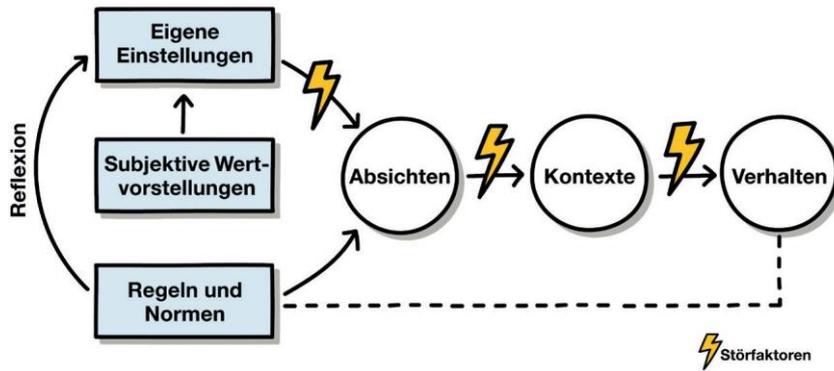
**Fig. 1: Purpose and diversity as an idealised anchor of all brand communication**



Source: Lebok U. Ginzburg P. in: Diversity Management (ed. by M. Terstiege\* Springer Gabler 2022)

Photos: © Adobe Stock, Company

**Fig. 2: Schematic representation of the Attitude-Behaviour-GAP**



Source: Own representation based on R.T. Kreuzer (HS Wirtschaft + Recht, Berlin)

In addition to one's own attitudes, social norms or peer group expectations have an effect, which are expressed in intentions to act and ultimately lead to behaviour. Interfering factors can be found between attitude and intention ("the mind is willing ..."), but above all contextualisations are decisive for action. Or in the words of the British communication expert Rory Sutherland: *"Same facts, but different context."* A Guinness simply tastes better in Ireland or in an Irish pub than at home in the living room. A Caribbean

Banana liqueur likes under palm trees on a beach in St. Lucia, at home under the stars.

not only critical, but also dangerous and wrong. In the end, a higher sense of purpose may well be important for companies - but it is "at least as important" to make money at the same time.

Behavioural economics also provides us with ample evidence that we humans do have attitudes that we want to align ourselves with, and that we do so to a certain extent. The emphasis is on **"to a certain extent"**. No matter how committed we are to sustainability, refugees or dementia, there will certainly be situations in which we simply don't want to know about it or in which these issues play a subordinate role in our later behaviour.

In fact, there are often inconsistencies between attitudes and desires in our everyday lives. When we at K&A BrandResearch started working for the packaging industry more than 10 years ago

research, we were always confronted with results from representative studies in which more than 70% of the respondents stated that sustainable packaging was highly relevant to them. In fact, sustainable packaging rarely played a role in purchasing decisions.

**We should ask ourselves whether we always want to behave like wind-up robots in accordance with the rules for all everyday issues.**

play a role. An Attitude-Behaviour GAP was found for the majority of consumers (Fig. 2): Attitudes and actual behaviour often diverge!

Friends, we wonder why we were so enthusiastic about such an awful-tasting drink on holiday. And the visit to a fair trade coffee plantation in Peru may have excited us so much "back then".

- When shopping for a big event with the (less) dear relatives, price and audience may lead to quite different situational decisions for the decision-making process.

We should ask ourselves whether we always want to behave like wind-up robots for all everyday topics. And whether, for example, we want to be reminded of some misconduct with an admonishing finger in a situation of maximum "desire for pleasure". In some situations we simply don't want to listen because the context is not geared to the "seriousness of life". Too much purpose, too many thoughts about diversity and correct (inclusive) behaviour leads to more thought.

and to less intuitive gut decisions in the System 1 autopilot.

### Diversity and the centre of society

While integration, inclusion and diversity have had a firm place in psychological and social science issues for decades, these topics have only gained momentum in marketing in recent years. The more complex and diverse social systems are, the more individual behaviour patterns result. For people in their everyday lives, this means that they have to be able to

The social environment, in which they live, allows them to adopt individual behavioural patterns, negate them or ascribe them to their everyday requirements in the best possible way. Such "distinction gains" (Bourdieu 1979) are the basis for adapted behaviour, lifestyles and trends, which also reinforce personal distinctiveness from others.

Many years later, marketing experts Byron Sharp and Jenni Romaniuk took up these ideas for marketing: Brands with clearly decodable and distinguishable distinctive brand assets lead to faster decisions through simple decoding.

with consumers. The better a brand is "marked" in the consumer perception, the faster it offers orientation and storytelling for consumers, the more it delivers "distinction gains" and a motivation to act on autopilot.

Orientation aids for decisions also offer us certainties. The psychologists Kahneman and Tversky had already been able to prove risk aversion in their studies on human behaviour in the 1970s: When making decisions under uncertainty, people value their losses more than possible potential gains. In so

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In social science studies, this so-called fear of loss is confirmed in connection with social norms, values and behavioural characteristics in social groups. Above all, the phenomenon of the (new)

The "middle of society" strives for security: What has been achieved so far creates a loose group affiliation through conforming behaviour ("good" income, socially and professionally recognised, owning a house, etc.). Studies on the social "middle" show that it is important for this socially influential group of the population to have a sense of

The aim of the project is to maintain a high level of education, but at the same time not to miss the boat (Fear of Missing Out).

Diversity always has to do with "Differentiation from something". In common parlance, the majority of the population understands this to mean deviations from the average, from the middle of society. That which largely corresponds to the middle is that which is generally perceived as "normal". Diversity increases individualisation. If we think it through to the end, individualisation in turn increases complexity: what is too unique makes it too complex.

This makes it more difficult for us to make quick decisions in everyday life. Divergent behaviour needs to be learned: Too much (or too radical) deviation can contribute to more confusion and disorientation.

### Beginnings of Diversity Communication

"Attention-grabbing diversity" looks more attractive in marketing and agency circles than "behavioural diversity". Diversity is often described as the strength of a diverse and colourful society.

Fig. 3: Beginnings of diversity communication



seen. Already in the 1980s, this attitude was implemented in advertising. Oliviero Toscani's revolutionary diversity communication for the United Colors of Benetton shook up socio-political hotspots in a particularly contrasting way and did everything to avoid being dismissed as empty advertising (cf. Fig. 3). Good-mood advertising was replaced by shock advertising, which brought this art of advertising numerous awards. For the fashion brand Benetton, this type of communication was the beginning of an economic downfall: people want to be able to buy something in the context of fashion and shopping, experience glamour, fun and joie de vivre rather than blood, horror and education.

The performance and media response of Unilever's Dove cosmetics brand was quite different. Since 2004, the brand has been advertising with "Real Beauty" to encourage women without a model figure to develop a positive body and self-esteem. As this is a global campaign, which was also on air in the UK with women of different skin colours, the communication could also be directly transferred to other countries.

"no racism" could be further developed. The brand was in the right place at the right time with diversity issues in the relevant market environment. At the same time, it found the necessary access to the target group of (somewhat) over-important women through a more appropriate tonality than Benetton.

Other brands were also associated with more marginalised milieus and were able to use this in a communicatively inclusive way, by appealing to their "exceptionality".



Fig. 4: Diversity communication in rainbow colours (shop window decoration, Louis Vuitton or similar).

The Hamburg beer brand Astra has succeeded in linking diversity, which is explicitly applied in the user community, with distinctiveness in its branding. The Hamburg beer brand Astra has succeeded in linking diversity explicitly in the user group with distinctiveness in branding. As early as the 1990s, the brand was associated with St. Pauli, Kiez, chavs, fringe groups and various "diverse" groups of people. By consciously using diversity as a typical St. Pauli pattern and by including the "rebellious" character of the lifestyles in the neighbourhood as an attitude and style element in the brand communication, the brand appears authentic in its language and appeals to people far beyond the borders of Hamburg.

### Diversity: What Works and What Doesn't

Astra is an example that shows that diversity can indeed be part of the brand's core.

Other brands quickly come to mind in this context: fritz-kola as a "wake-up call" for a sustainable and democratic society, Tony's Chocolonely as an enthusiastic chocolate manufacturer that wants to convince its customers of fair trade in the Third World (and correspondingly higher prices) in line with the motto "slave-free but crazy", or various outdoor brands such as Vaude or Patagonia. If sustainability and social commitment are part of the brand DNA from the very beginning, then even diversity communication can contribute to more credibility, differentiation and consumer acceptance. This does not only have to be done in an "admonishing" way, but can also be done with a large portion of humour, as expressed time and again by the numerous specials of the BVG (Berliner Verkehrsverbund).

However, there are also many more brand manufacturers who try to present themselves as particularly sustainable or "diverse". Mostly they pursue

next to regular fries at McDonald's as short-term promotion items may be thoroughly well-intentioned intentions of burger chains to increase "diversity".

In numerous other decision-making situations in our everyday lives, diversity or purpose issues are also downstream for us as consumers. The belief that brands are still extremely important for us as consumers today is not true.

The idea that the social responsibility and diversity claims of individual brands are important and that we waste enough time and energy to deal with them in depth belongs more in the drawer of marketing fantasies.

Too much politicisation of brands, too strong a commitment (overnight) to the different facets of diversity can be a tripwire for sustainable brand management. The more specifically certain target groups are addressed, the more individually brand messages are sent on different channels, the more diffuse the brand image is experienced by the consumer. A multifaceted brand image is created in the mind of the viewer, "diverse" brand in the mind's eye. However, because of increasing diversity, the brand image also becomes

When attitude and social commitment are part of the brand DNA from the start, then even diversity communication can lead to more credibility, differentiation and popularity among consumers.

The majority of the members of the group have their own interests and use diversity or other social currents as a Trojan horse in order to appear more contemporary. Activities during Pride Month are a popular means of communication. (Fig. 4) Some medium-sized companies may well pursue socio-political intentions, but the majority of companies are accused of communicative pinkwashing because they do nothing or simply too little for LGBTQ+ diversity. "Pride Whoppers" at Burger King or so-called "Rainbow Sticks".

to celebrate". Both actions met with incomprehension in the social media.

Diversity communication remains a double-edged sword: it can appear untrustworthy and trigger a shitstorm. But there is also the danger of losing regular customers if "too much diversity" is communicated for the broad mass taste in the respective industry environment: When carrots or soup vegetables are bought for a stew, diversity issues are only of marginal interest in this context.



**Fig. 5: Diversity-driven brand relaunch of Sarotti and Ben's Original**



less coherent and distinctive: too much and too diverse often means **"too much of many things"** for brands!

Brands go one step further in communicating with consumers when even the branding is revised to be contemporary and diversity-compliant (Fig. 5). Since 1918, the chocolate brand Sarotti has used a Moor with a tower and a tray as a trademark for cocoa enjoyment in reference to the former company headquarters in Mohrenstrasse. Not least because of "racist implications on the part of the viewer" and the general trend towards genderism, the Saotti Moor with flag was replaced by a magician with golden skin (!) balancing on a crescent moon and reaching for the stars. As a "magician of the senses", he is supposed to tie in with the golden times of the brand.

Mars-Wrigley also completed Uncle Ben's rice brand has undergone a brand and packaging relaunch in the spirit of social responsibility and service.

diversity. Since August 2021, the products of "Uncle Ben's" have been sold throughout Germany as "Ben's Original" - still in the striking blood-orange colour code, but without Uncle Ben with black skin. The new brand vision of "offering everyone a place at the table" is less obvious from the packaging and brand identity and certainly does not make the brand more distinctive in the sense of Byron Sharp. Whether Ben's Original is a racist product today is not clear, according to WMN. "Matter of interpretation". Here opinions differed, as the name "Ben" still seems racist, even if the logo no longer <sup>is1</sup>.

The critical voices with regard to the diversity claim once again underline that **situational contexts are decisive** as to whether discrimination is present or not. According to the context principle of philosophy, every action, every statement and every object only acquires meaning "in relation to something". If, for example, "Ben's

Original" as successor to If we look at a brand as "Uncle Ben's" and in the tradition of its brand history, corresponding schemata can be called up very quickly. Even without obvious symbolism and forced genderisation, the vernacular does find ways for exclusion in everyday life.

In the end, diversity that is really lived out shows itself in contexts - in actual (not intended) buying behaviour and in consistent brand management.



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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wmn.de/health/food/rassistische-produkte-heute-und-frueher-im-supermarkt-id38033>