Modern marketing in disguise: creating value connections between companies and consumers
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Chapter 2 The Glue Value of Brands

2-1 Introduction
Marketing as the science of ‘how to bring products to the market’ finds its origin in the study of spatial distribution. When the United States of America where rapidly expanding in the beginning of the twentieth century, the need arose to get product to markets in the most efficient manner. After the World War II the rapid evolution of information technology, as well as new psychology insights, gave marketing managers, politicians, and academics the illusion of possibilities for manipulation and control. This went hand in hand with the establishment of a methodological marketing dogma, based on the scientific method as applied in the natural sciences which implied heavy use of statistical modeling and inference (Wilkie and Moore 2003). Marketing was adopted by business and politics as the science which would allow institutions to manage and address those masses which, if left by themselves, were not able to get to an optimum outcome or make best choices. However, these attempts at manipulation did not go totally unnoticed at the time as, for instance, Vance Packard (1957) questioned their morality.

The alternative movements of the sixties, and the subsequent development of postmodern ideas have led more scholars to question the normative and prescriptive character of marketing, a perspective, however, that is still shared by the largest part of the academic marketing world: the marketing academic, or marketing guru as both a ‘doctor Feelgood’ as well as an entertainer. Chris Hackley criticises mainstream marketing severely and argues that most marketing scholars “employ quasi-scientific terms in the rhetorical construction of a legitimating discourse, only to jettison scientific claims when such terms are used to attack that construction” (Hackley 2001: 76), which is tantamount to saying that marketing has no problem importing terms and concepts from other sciences in order to give the discipline an authoritative and scientific aura. Moreover, he shows how the prescriptive nature of marketing (i.e. professing to tell companies what to do instead of helping companies and executives to understand the complexity of the phenomenon in question) inhibits instead of fosters knowledge development because: “the normative tone of mainstream rhetoric does all the work without opening up sticky problems of coherence or intellectual grounding” (ibid:

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12 An extensive documentary of the BBC, ‘The Century Of Self’ posits that not only are some of the most important prophets of marketing in those years, Edward Barneys, Matthew and Anna Freud, basing their recepes on Freud’s insights, they were even close family to the founder of psychoanalysis!
So the rhetorical construction of terms and rules that once served to legitimise marketing as a science is now undermining its very credibility.

Postmodern marketing must be understood in the context of this critique which is, in a sense, not strictly postmodern. Postmodernism, basically a challenge to modernism, has rediscovered the interpretive tradition in science which was traditionally relegated to social studies (Brown 1995). One could state that postmodernism has indeed moved marketing to a new address: from business economics to social studies. The rediscovery of cultural studies, sociology, philosophy, literature, and history by marketers, especially those looking at consumer behaviour and advertising, would also help marketing in a context were consumers do not shop to satisfy their needs, but to ‘negotiate their identities’ and (even more pretentiously) give meaning to their lives. As Fournier aptly puts it: “Consumers do not choose brands, they choose lives” (1998: 367, Italics in the original). So in the 80s and 90s products and brands could quickly gain an iconic status because of their more prominent social role. At the same time postmodern ideas helped marketing scholars to justify the use of qualitative, interpretive research methods to understand what brands do to people, but also what people do to brands.

In this chapter I will try to acknowledge for the complexity of producer-consumer relationships, i.e. the value connection between brands and consumers, by exploring its cultural and social dimensions. First I will clarify what I mean by modernism, postmodernism and hypermodernism in section 2-2. Then in section 2-3 I will classify contemporary marketing approaches along a dimension, the HyPo dimension, based on the assumption that prediction, control, and manipulation at the basis of those approaches is possible. The HyPo dimension also constitutes most of the general framework I will use to analyse my data. Before introducing a more specific operational model that links marketing and the value proposition in terms of the HyPo dimension (in the next chapter), I have to further explain why I relate consumer behaviour to values in section 2-4 and explore how values have been defined and measured in the next section 2-5. Then in section 2-6 I will briefly comment on the concept of individualisation, as this is one of the main issues in the modern-postmodern discourse, and I will introduce the social dimension to the valuation process in section 2-7. In section 2-8 I am going to add the commercial dimension to these sociological insights, to explore what people do to brands. In other words, instead of looking at how individuals add values to a brand, I will first account for the people’s social nature, and then look at how consumers relate to brands. Finally in section 2-9 I will combine these insights to develop an
indicator for the strength of a company’s value proposition and its signs in a socio-cultural context, that which I call the The Glue Value of brands.

2-2 Modernism, Postmodernism and Hypermodernism

Modernism can be seen as a reference to mainstream marketing, the good old days in which everything seemed predictable, orderly, and controllable. Modernism is, of course, a term with quite a few meanings and connotations. For centuries modernity has been the term used for everything new compared to existing traditions. A peculiarity of the actual discussion is, that modernity is now seen, at least partly, as something of the past, so that we can talk about postmodernism (from the Latin post = after).

It is possibly in the field of the arts, architecture, and urban planning that modernism has its most precise meaning and it is basically associated with the period between 1920 and 1960: “It was a term that covered a range of movements and styles in different countries, especially those flourishing in key cities in Germany and Holland, as well as in Moscow, Paris, Prague, and later, New York. All of these sites were stages for an espousal of the new and, often, an equally vociferous rejection of history and tradition; a utopian desire to create a better world, to reinvent the world from scratch; an almost messianic belief in the power and potential of the machine and industrial technology; a rejection of applied ornament and decoration; an embrace of abstraction; and a belief in the unity of all the arts – that is, an acceptance that traditional hierarchies that separated the practices of art and design, as well as those that detached the arts from life, were unsuitable for a new era. All of these principles were frequently combined with social and political beliefs (largely left-leaning) which held that design could, and should transform society” (Wilk, 2006: 14).

Optimism regarding the possibility of shaping, designing, moulding or modeling societies went, however, hand in hand with a traditional kind of elitism and paternalism. Mass political parties and movements gave people their basic identity which, as a rule, was not questioned, also because as there was a clear division of labour between leaders and those to be led (Van Schendelen, 1984).

In the realm of economy, modernism was the period of the supply-side. As there still was a relative scarcity of goods, it was still relatively easy to sell innovations. In fashion modernism was the period of the fashion diktat, with Paris as its undisputed capital. From New York to

13 The following two sections have been co-authored by Dany Jacobs.
Moscow, the fashion magazines reported what happened in Paris and translated this to their local audiences. In their turn consumers were prepared to follow these fashions diktats that were proposed to them by the main fashion designers, in a relatively docile way (McDowell 2000: 12-30).

Society was kept together by institutions which were hierarchical and paternalistic in nature. These are the so called metanarratives, like communism, capitalism, or religion, dictating lifestyles, as well as rather stable believes and values. At the same time that marketing as a managerial practice was being conceptualised, computers and new statistical techniques, like factor analysis, allowed to observe and model consumer behaviour. This was done in order to 1) legitimise marketing as a science in its own right (defining the borders through the positivistic methodological stance) and 2) pretend to influence and change consumer behaviour, as was being done successfully with other natural, albeit inanimate, entities (Wilkie and Moore 2003). The metanarratives of modernism implied the possibility of a move towards a better, new-and-improved (brave new) world. These normative tendencies necessarily imply the possibility to study, understand, and thus manipulate people’s perceptions and behaviour. The scientific turn in marketing actually went hand-in-hand with a necessary normative approach (Wilkie and Moore 2003). I already mentioned the still very popular criticisms of Vance Packard (1957), who in “The Hidden Persuaders” showed how marketing communications could, in a subtle way, manipulate people’s consuming behaviour. However, his suggestions were never fully tested empirically and they may eventually have contributed to a rather negative connotation of the marketing field.

From the 60s onward this modernist illusion was shattered more and more. Ever larger groups broke away from their social and ideological backgrounds. As a consequence, in their different economic and political roles of consumers and voters, people became more volatile and unpredictable in their preferences. Increasingly people were no more prepared to be led. Moreover, new critical studies made them aware of attempts at manipulation in the field of marketing and advertising. People also learned that it was possible to withstand top-down decisions through forms of social action and civil disobedience.

Finally, with the rise of the consumer society there was a shift in power in the economy from the supply to the demand side. With increasing supply, people were able to make choices. Moreover, increasing information about global developments led people to question the social and ecological impact of economic growth and internationalisation. As a consequence
modernity is no longer seen as progress by definition. At the same time, the negative aspects of well-meant modernist utopian designs (from communist experiments to renewal plans in the realm of urban planning) became more clearly visible. ‘Postmodernism’ (‘pomo’ for friends), with its declaration of the end of all Great Stories, can be seen as the philosophical translation of this end of modernist illusions.

Modernist ideas, are however, not dead. In the field of management, ‘cockpit approaches’ (Jacobs, 2010) in which managers do all the organisation’s thinking, planning, and designing, while the other people are mainly seen as possible sources of resistance, are still quite popular. Many marketers recognise the difficulties of controlling and predicting consumer behaviour, but only see this as a necessity for even more pursuing the ideal of controllability and predictability with the help of ‘hypermodern’, hyper-sophisticated models, for instance based on data mining, RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) chips and increasingly differentiated socio-cultural and economic segmentations of consumer groups (‘micro-targeting’). It remains true that measuring all and everything is not entirely futile. Sometimes it leads to some useful data on the basis of which decisions on production levels and changes in style and colour can be made with acceptable failure rates (Leeflang 2005b).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 2-1: Typical features of postmodern marketing (based on Firat and Venkatesh 1993, Brown 1994)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) <strong>Hyperreality</strong>: The blurring boundaries between image and the original</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) <strong>Fragmentation</strong>: a plethora of trends, tastes and markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) <strong>Reversal of consumption and production</strong>: Consumers are also producers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) <strong>Decentring of the subject</strong>: which Brown (1994) translates into anti-authoritarism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) <strong>Paradoxical juxtapositions</strong> (of opposites): small and large, beautiful and ugly co-exist.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Brown (1994: 140) considers Micromarketing as postmodern in the sense that it accounts for differences on a small scale (i.e. fragmentation) However, in our definition postmodern marketing is characterised by assumptions of predictability and control, hence in our conception micromarketing is typically Hypermodern.

2-3 The HyPo dimension

In section 1-2 I have shown how ‘solutions’ to the marketing crisis can be classified in two categories. We have also seen how two reflexive marketing professionals can be seen as representatives of two opposite directions out of the marketing crisis, which can be labeled hypermodern (Leeflang) or postmodern (Wouters).
- Hypermodern: more sophisticated and updated models have to be developed to better understand (and control) actual unreliable consumers. And non-marketing professionals should keep out of the marketing kitchen.

- Postmodern: the way to deal with consumers so far has not been effective, and as a consequence the basic premises of practicing and theorising in marketing must be reviewed.

In my view the two alternative propositions are not necessarily mutually exclusive. When taking the perspective of the company, or the supplier, as one can see from figure 2-1 below, I see a basic dichotomy of marketing approaches from hypermodern to postmodern, but with some variation. Some variants are more into the middle, but there is a kind of polarisation: does the firm try to be in control or not? I also think that hypermodern firms concentrate more on the level of a product’s functionality, and postmodern ones more on the level of symbolic values. In the end, of course, all market transactions are based on an emotional value connection between supply and demand. The approaches on the right hand side of the figure are probably more aware of this.

![Figure 2-1 Marketing at extremes including intermediate forms](image)

Again, on the left side of the diagram a hypermodern approach to marketing implies a tendency or pretension to control, address, and manipulate customer perceptions, it assumes a tabula rasa consumer mind that has to be imprinted with company values; on the opposite side postmodern marketing implies a cultural approach, or more simply stated it implies acknowledging initiatives from the consumer side, whether functionally or emotionally. The tabula rasa is the firm. Of course, most marketing communication is in between the two extremes. For the sake of consistency I have identified five basic approaches and denominated these from HyPo I until HyPo V.
HyPo I: Manipulation of consumers’ perceptions and buying behaviour

In hypermodern approaches the consumer is merely considered the receiver of a company’s messages. Therefore the marketing effort will only generate desired outcomes if a company is able to accurately assess and address consumers. For this it is necessary to chart these consumers as precisely as possible. On the basis of this, a unidirectional marketing effort can be designed. In Figure 2 we therefore see two arrows: one of market research, collecting ‘hard facts’ on consumer behaviour, the other of the marketing effort itself.

![Figure 2-2: HyPo I, Hypermodern marketing as a company owned effort](image)

Marketing communication approaches that can be brought together in this first category are:

- Data mining, microtargeting and contact optimisation. Data mining can be seen as extreme market research. Target market profiles can be generated through all kinds of hypermodern methods coupled with extensive CRM databases based on learning systems. The more data are processed in the most intelligent way the more accurate the model of consumer segmentation becomes. This may then become the input for microtargeting. This latter term has been in the news recently since, in particular in the United States of America, political parties have been applying in-depth data analysis to target potential voters with quite specific messages in a very focused manner. In retail it is sometimes also used to introduce a system of differential pricing. In a similar way, contact optimisation combines customer, geography, product, and predictive data and helps marketers, by using sophisticated mathematical models, to determine the optimal message to deliver to each customer. Contact optimisation is suited for high-volume direct marketing organisations that face the unenviable task of reconciling millions of combinations of customers, offers, and channels with customer analytics, business rules, and contact policies to deliver the optimal message to each customer.
• Stealth, astroturf. This is often called ‘under the radar’ or undercover marketing as well; it is a compendium of tools that run counter to mass exposure. The message stays under the radar of the mass media; it cannot be identified by the traditional or mass ‘detectors’ but should be able to determine customers’ perceptions, evaluations, and buying behaviour. A modern form is ‘astroturf’ which organises fake activism or support for a brand or product, especially on the internet. It is, however, not without risk as nowadays quite a few people recognise such endeavours and publish them. So, is a tactic that may backfire (Israel 2006).

• Permission marketing, personal casting. After Seth Godin’s 1999 book, ‘permission marketing’ has gained momentum. Mostly in exchange for small rewards (e.g. air miles) customers give marketers access to information about their buying behaviour and are even prepared to change that behaviour. In exchange for a few air miles they may for example alter their travel routes. Internet increases opportunities for what is called ‘opt-in’ mail; email messages that consumers ask for. The consumers’ permission to contact them is the first step towards developing a mutual relationship. Personal casting is a variation on this theme. It is based on two principles: getting in personal contact with a customer through mail messaging makes the consumer feel special and as the relationship unfolds the user is rewarded.

Traditionally nondemographic market segmentation has been looking more at buying behaviour than at demographic factors. This led to socio- or psychographic ideal types like ‘High Tech Harry’ or ‘Joe Six-Pack’ trying to capture real people’s lifestyles, attitudes, self-images, and aspirations. As the predictive value of this approach has decreased over time, new ways of segmentation are now proposed based on the importance of a product or service to different kinds of consumers, in theory allowing firms to concentrate on those customers who will generate the most profit (Yankelovich & Meer 2006).

• TEASE. TEASE is an acronym devised by the heterodox marketing professor Stephen Brown (2003): Tantalize and torment customers, Employ exclusivity, Amplify a message, Sell secrets and mystery, Entertain. Here consumers are not manipulated in their buying behaviour through detailed information about themselves, but on the basis of some well-known psychological insights: the greater the exclusivity, the more consumers are seduced into buying... Brown, who has written books on postmodern
marketing, would possibly be surprised to find himself at this side of the dichotomy, but this approach is clearly of the one-sided, manipulative kind.

**HyPo II** Manipulating consumers’ perceptions, hoping to influence their behaviour

The second category we distinguish looks more like traditional push marketing and advertising. One pushes products to the market, that to some extent are related to well-known trends, but without too much market research or interaction. So, looking at Figure 2-2, the grey rectangle of market research is more or less neglected. In this category we list:

- **Traditional advertising.** From traditional media to banners and pop-ups on the internet. Product placement in different media. Companies try to get exposure by making sure their products are used in TV programs or, more and more frequently, in video games. Companies actually produce or sponsor whole TV shows, magazines, or computer games to promote their products. When soap producer Procter and Gamble started this practice this was the origin of ‘soap operas’. It may actually go further than product placement when it allows companies to control the whole concept around the product. This may lean towards manipulative undercover (see 4.1) or more interactive cause marketing (4.3).

- **Guerrilla marketing.** An inexpensive version of traditional advertising, a concept originally coined by Jay Levinson in 1982. It should help small, financially less viable companies to attract attention to their products through focused and specific actions, aimed at surprising customers, and creating a community of privileged people who know ‘what is behind the cryptic message’ or ‘where the next shop will open’. Like in guerrilla warfare, small focused actions should beat bigger planned attacks.

- **Endorsement by celebrities.** Getting attention and followers through the connection with popular people from show business, sports or the media.

- **Online company generated videos.** Instead of creating stealth (4.1) or stimulating unofficial movies (4.5) to create a buzz (see 4.4.), companies also generate videos they post online through social networking sites, as a form of online advertising. If

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supported by banners this mass approach seems more effective than just banners or TV ads\textsuperscript{15}.

**HyPo III Interactive marketing**

**Figure 2-3 Marketing as interaction**

In this form, there is actual interaction between the two parties – firms and consumers. They influence each other, but do not necessarily identify with each other. Basically they remain different parties. If we compare this with the two previous basic approaches the mediation is more interactive, as can be seen from Figure 3. Moreover, both parties are aware that there should be some form of value connection between them.

Different forms can be recognised here as well:

- Coolhunting, infiltration, tribal marketing, grassroots marketing. Coolhunting is a form of action research. Especially consumer goods’ companies send out a kind of cultural detectives, mostly young people themselves, into ‘cool territories’ like the playgrounds in poor urban neighbourhoods, underground clubs or trendy bars to scout new trends. The game is to be the first to grab the newest, coolest culture, before it becomes mass culture, and integrate it in their campaigns or even in product development. A more active version tries to turn the coolest people into advocates of their brand, like Red Bull did by creating a school for DJ’s. Then it becomes more like infiltration: infiltrating in the kind of group or tribe we discussed in Part 3 (therefore ‘tribal marketing’) by addressing the key ‘selectors’, opinion leaders or role models (in the latter case it becomes more like endorsement, see 4.2). It may allow community members to develop a strong emotional connection with the brand. In this way it is also related to the term ‘grassroots marketing’.

\textsuperscript{15} See http://www.marketing-online.nl/nieuws/ModuleItem47886.html Retrieved January 2007
• Mapping the co-evolving selection system. Buying is never an isolated decision. It is affected by all kinds of preselection (e.g. by buyers of retail chains), influence (e.g. media, experts, critics, opinion leaders, peer group members), and selection. This is a complex co-evolving system which nobody really controls, but that may be mapped in order to find the critical links, to try to influence them, but to learn from them as well (Jacobs 2007).

• Cause marketing. Here marketing messages are really based on a value connection by connecting to a good cause (the Third World, the environment, anti-racism and the like) that many people support. The brand ‘Red’, initiated by U2 singer Bono, is a good example of this.

• Active streetmarketing. Actually a form of direct personal marketing. It involves going out on the streets to hand out flyers or samples (also called ‘tryvertising’), with the aim to learn from reactions. This is a bit what political parties do as well, when they go out on the streets to talk to people and hand out flyers before elections. This form of marketing is very old. It actually existed already before the advent of mass media, but companies, as well as political parties, use it now to directly access a very specific group in their own context. In this way it also resembles the next form.

• Ambient or place-based marketing involves placing ads on spots or products that are unusual, like paper towels, drink holders or natural environments. The aim is to reach users at the very moment they are willing to devote attention to the message. Red Bull, for instance, started off by throwing empty cans of the drink in toilets of popular discos in larger cities.

• Conversational marketing. This approach involves customers, but other stakeholders as well, in a conversation based on ‘low voice, listening and understanding’, instead of ‘shouting, amplifying and shooting’. Now internet-based social networks give companies the opportunity to get involved in conversations with consumers to achieve two goals: involving customers in the product conception and marketing process as well as getting an image of caring and understanding. Adaptation, i.e. iterative actions adjusted by customer input is a much more viable strategy than thinking of and introducing a whole concept out of the blue (Levine et al.. 2000; Wipperfurth 2005).

Interactive gaming. Games, whether online or not, have long been a prominent setting for companies to promote their products. Nowadays, however, companies are developing games to draw attention and create customer loyalty (e.g. giving away free products when players
reach certain targets) and to try to sell as well or to get consumer feedback through games. Second Life may be the most talked about online game that became an online world. Companies like Gap and Reebok have opened virtual stores, where consumers can customise their products and pay with virtual money that has to be exchanged for real money. And Philips Design wants to get feedback through Second Life on some of its ideas for product innovations.

**HyPo IV  Interactive marketing and co-evolution**

With the latter examples, it may have seemed as if we had already entered this category of interactive marketing. In interactive marketing, however, we talk not just about buying and feedback. Now customers become active players in the marketing itself. They react to the firm’s offer, or maybe to a kind of provocation that leads to a lot of interaction, especially among consumers themselves, as is illustrated in Figure 2-4.

**Figure 2-4: Interactive marketing and co-evolution**

- **Viral or Buzz Marketing.** Buzz and viral Marketing can be seen as the basic idea of this fourth approach, another idea promoted by Seth Godin with his book Unleashing the Idea virus (2000). Viruses may spread diseases virulently, and on the internet viruses can cause huge damages very rapidly by their capacity to spread around at an exponential rate. So, the idea of a virus is quite appealing to marketers. Basically, the idea is that a message generated by a company is spread around by non-company actors. The spreading can happen in a serendipitous, or spontaneous manner, or it can be pushed by a company that creates a Buzz. So the question is how to develop a concept that becomes a buzz, i.e. generates a unique, spontaneous personal exchange of information (Godin 2003; Wipperfurth 2005). Gladwell (2000) not only links it to
the stickiness of the message, but also to the character of the people spreading the message.

- Word of Mouth, the phenomenon that consumers talk about a product or a brand has been a major source of sales and therefore revenue for a long time (Arndt 1967), but it has received more attention recently. The Word of Mouth Marketing Association defines it as: The act of consumers providing information to other consumers. Or: giving people a reason to talk about your products and services, and making it easier for that conversation to take place. Or: the art and science of building active, mutually beneficial consumer-to-consumer and consumer-to-marketer communications. But this leads immediately to hypermodern attempts at control. Procter and Gamble, for example, has engaged 600,000 of the more socially active housewives to spread coupons and talk about products through its ‘Vocalpoint’ program\(^{16}\). But P&G tries to do it in a not very transparent way (see 4.1 stealth). To be clear: the Word of Mouth Marketing Association does not agree with these kinds of approaches\(^{17}\).

- Word of Mouse. Word of Mouth through the internet. Some companies create a gadget, like an easy game, that can be picked up by consumers as well as an incentive for consumers to forward it to others. An example of the more spontaneous world of mouse is that of the publications of ‘unofficial’ short videos, generated by a company, that are being spread for their shocking content (e.g. Ford KA, Volkswagen Polo).

**HyPo V** Consumers in the lead

In the final approach, the firm hands over control to the consumers. This does not mean, however, that the firm does not have any responsibility anymore.

- Consumer Generated Content, Co-creation. The content here may refer to media content (advertisings, videos) but also to the product itself. The idea is that consumers feel involved in the marketing of a product, by, for example, generating videos that advocate a brand’s message – not necessarily the message or values the firm itself tries to convey. Firms may actually adopt some of these messages and even reward the

\(^{16}\) *BusinessWeek*, May 2006: http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/06_22/b3986060.htm

Retrieved December 2007

selected ones (see also crowdsourcing). Co-creation goes one step further by involving consumers in the creation of the product. With the help of new digital design tools, it is increasingly possible for consumers to design their own products and to outsource these to manufacturing firms. These firms may in turn adopt some of the designs and reward their creators (Von Hippel, 2005).

- Crowdsourcing: increasingly firms outsource questions and problems through the internet to anyone who want to contribute,

The list I have presented here does not cover the multitude of marketing approaches circulating nowadays, but illustrates the degree to which the marketing landscape has become fragmented, and that the marketing concept may indeed assume a new significance consequently.

2-4 Why Values?

One of the mantras implied by the Marketing Concept is customer orientation. This is true because to embrace the marketing philosophy means in the first place to ‘learn what customers want and to give it to them in a better and different way than competitors’ (a.o. Kotler 1969). In the 60s this might have sounded insightful and unproblematic, but in chapter 1 we have seen that even as different products and brands have gained iconic status because of their cultural and symbolic role in the later decades, assessing consumer needs has become more difficult. Maybe Henry Ford already realised that when he said “if I would have asked consumers what they wanted, they would have responded: a faster horse”.

More recently a growing body of literature shows how human decision-making processes are anything but conscious and linear (a.o. Ariely 2008). Consumers nowadays decide what to buy at the last moment (Spijkerman 2006), and they shop because they want to be surprised by ‘memorable experiences’ (Boswik et al. 2007). Even the availability of internet-based social networking would affect the consumer decision-making processes, as the availability of new (peer-to-peer) information systems impacts the evaluative phase in the purchasing process (Edelman 2011). To complicate things even further, we have seen in the first chapter that according to postmodern insights consumers are now taking over the role of producers to become, at times, ‘prosumers’ (as in Saren 2007).

What becomes clear, hopefully, is that consumers seem to become unpredictable, they follow a logic of their own, and that for a company this means, acknowledging a more or less active
role of consumers in the valuation process is not the same as being customer orientated. Companies that, for instance, make extended use of database technology to customise offers and marketing communications are considered to be customer oriented, but in our HyPo terms they are mostly customer orienting. In their search for needs and wants companies typically look for shared preferences in order to be able to address their consumers consistently. Using postmodern approaches mostly means being uncertain whether the value propositions will have some relevance and if so for whom. When these are successful that means that propositions by these companies are relevant for some consumers as well. I have used the concept of relevance here also because according to a.o. Gladwell, the most important condition for information to stick in people’s heads is its relevance, which it gets by its strategic importance (Gladwell 2000: 89). One could even argue that the term ‘important’ already implies strategic value, i.e. a product or brand is considered important (and thus worth purchasing) because it contributes to the realisation of certain goals. In these terms a value proposition is a promise related to the realisation of relevant goals, and goals are represented by a system of values, which is a cultural system. A value connection is established when these supply and demand side values coincide as it where, and even co-evolve. In this sense values always have a cultural and thus communal origin.

In the context of marketing as a process of valuation, consumers estimate benefits (see box 2-2 for the relation between values, preferences, benefits and needs) and evaluate the promises implied in a company’s value proposition by relating these to a personal system of values. These benefits, however, must be interpreted and recognised as such. When these benefits are measurable in objective terms to some extent (a faster car, low-fat food) then one can always rationalise a choice, either before or after the purchase. Mostly though, benefits are not that evident in objective terms, as the valuation process becomes filled with appreciations along the lines of ‘because I like it’ or ‘it is cute, nice,…’. So in practice one cannot distinguish that easy between functional benefits on the one side and emotional ones, implied by signs and symbols, on the other (see Box 2.3 for a clarification of the role of signs). At the core of the formation and expression of preferences there is always a system, or a set of conflicting systems, of values representing one’s group on one side and certain individual goals on the other. Now if understanding and observing values is of strategic importance for our disquisition, next we should have a further look at how this concept has been defined and observed in the literature.
Box 2-2 Preferences, Benefits, Values and Needs.

One of the classic discussions concerning marketing (see also chapter 1) is whether it satisfies existing (maybe latent) needs, or creates them. This is like questioning if needs are hereditary or acquired through culture. According to recent insights on how culture and genes co-evolve (Laland et al. 2010), this question is quickly answered though: sometimes ‘invented’ needs become engrained in our genetic set-up. Conversely the establishment of needs, preferences, and values that inform behavioural norms can be considered a process of cultural selection which is a biological necessity as well, since it promotes a social cohesion necessary for survival which goes beyond the family level context (i.e. kin selection). This also explains why humans have a higher and more evolved kind of cultural variation than other species.

The logic of the relationship between these concepts could be described by the following situation. A clerk in a financial institution needs a new shirt, why does he prefer a classic style, white model? Because this specific model gives him the benefit of a higher probability of social acceptance in the financial world. Because the values that typify the financial world (competitiveness? Stakhanovism? ambition?) are represented by such a shirt.

As Vanessa Friedman, chief fashion editor of the Financial Times comments, referring to the clothing style of London’s City: “…that particular combo (blue, white, blue) is shaping up as this generation’s political and economic power uniform, as seen on most world leaders under 50, not to mention the bankers who want to woo them” (What suits George Osborne Financial Times, October 20, 2010).

My quest for the origin of values, instead of that of preferences and benefits, therefore derives from the fact that shared values (or the very fact that values are shared) inform and thus precede the formation of an individual’s emotions and instincts that lead to the valuation of benefits and the formation of preferences.

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Box 2-3 The functional relevance of signs

According to the Collins English dictionary (edition of 2005) something is relevant when it has “to do with the matter in hand”. Etymologically the word finds its origins in the Latin word ‘relevare’ which literally means to highlight, but also to mitigate, or alleviate. So we could say that something is relevant when it promises a relief. In our context that means that economic exchange will happen when the offered proposition relieves the buyer of a burden, which is of course close to the marketing aim of satisfying needs and wants, but also goes beyond in that it recognises that a need or want arises because of some kind of (present or future) impediment. This impediment can be functional, like not having a razor to shave, or symbolic. So for instance the need for a new tie might arise because of a prospected impediment of limited social acceptance on a specific occasion (e.g. the white shirt in box 2-2). This is what Roland van Kralingen (2002), in the context of branding, refers to as a social, as opposed to a technological, risk. The symbolic value of a product can thus be reduced to the – functional – question: Will it work in a social context?

2-5 The origin of value

To understand the valuation process we have to disentangle the mainstream view of marketing that it is only the company that creates value. This is quite obvious, since it remains marketing’s goal (as an organisational function or activity) to find out and communicate what the relevance of the value proposition is for its target consumers. Clearly this view is a descendant of the paternalistic feature of modernism: the company decides what is good for you and why. On the left side of the HyPo dimension one could discern attempts to address people’s behaviour, for instance through the rhetoric that is implicit in advertising messages. They suggest univocal causal effects like ‘if you buy this, then…’, act upon obvious and inevitable arguments like ‘Are you feeling tired often? Then…’, or leverage on basic instincts like ‘if you want the best for your baby…’, or on vague ideological non-critical arguments such as ‘good for the environment’. These rhetoric constructions are referring to shared opinions and value-judgments. As we move to the right side of the HyPo dimension it becomes a bit more difficult to univocally state and explain the relevance of the value proposition because in postmodern terms values are mostly emotional, spontaneous and
idiosyncratic. In order to develop a kind of indicator of the values implied in the value proposition of a company we have to further explore the concept of values and their origin.

In section 1 we have seen how marketing is essentially a process of valuation, in which two main actors are involved: suppliers and consumers. We also saw that consumers are the final selectors of a value proposition. Successful value propositions add value to the life of consumers, but also to that of companies (as Michael Porter famously stated, it is not enough to find a niche in the market, this niche must also be profitable). But what does adding values precisely mean? Where do values come from? Some assume that values are ‘out there’ and shared in different degrees by different people (reductionist approaches), others say they are a product of culture, and as such emergent and context-dependent (interpretive approaches).

After having discussed these approaches, I contend that both stances can be combined as the level of definition differs: some values are relatively stable and shared among a large group of people, others are more idiosyncratic.

Reductionist approaches

According to Rokeach, and in line with the first stance mentioned above, values are out there, ready to be ordered by academics for further understanding. For Rokeach the value system is a "hierarchical organisation; a rank ordering of ideals or values in order of importance." (1976. p. 124), he classifies values as ‘instrumental’ or ‘terminal’. The first are addressing behaviour (e.g. being good for the environment), the second goals, final states (e.g. balance, in this case between men and nature). Based on this kind of approach several scholars have been developing lists of items to measure values (appropriately called LOV, or list of values) and have been busy reducing these lists looking for item correlations and shared variance. This is, however, an approach that aims at finding communalities among a group of people as large as possible, in order to be able to subsequently classify them into ‘segments’. Instrumental values, or values that describe the people’s behaviour, have been classified for the sake of market segmentation by motivational researchers, and led to the creation of reference models

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21 Here I will leave the role of the product out as that goes beyond the scope of this study.
22 The initial ones being those who decide within the company’s boundaries, and the ‘gatekeepers’ follow, like opinion leaders, or what Godin in ‘Purple Cow’ calls sneezers.
of classification like the ‘VAlues and Lyfe-Styles’ (VALS) for the population of the United States, or the Mentality-Model, comprising both instrumental and terminal kinds of values for the Netherlands. Thomson and Troester (2002) note that following these LOV kind of approaches “the ideals or values being ranked are assumed to correspond in a fairly isomorphic fashion to universal or essential psychological needs” (ibid: 551). That is, akin to the Maslow hierarchy of needs that, by the way, has never really shown to be tenable across large enough sets of empirical data (Milfort and Rosenthal 1995). Developing a list that factors and represents a number of items to define a generally applicable scale is also referred to as a reductionist approach. Thomson and Troester (2002: 551), among others, are critical towards these kinds of approaches in their comments: “reductionism is a slippery slope that can impede rather than facilitate scholarly efforts to better understand the workings of complex sociocultural processes and structures”. And as we have seen before, marketing is a complex sociocultural process (and eventually a structure) of economic exchange, in that consumers pay money to get some kind of benefit. Moreover, in a postmodern marketing context characterised by differentiation and fragmentation (see box 2-1), the quest is not for universal or essential psychological needs, but for the nature of values addressing individual preferences and buying behaviour. But do individual preferences reflect the existence of individual values? In the realm of economics individuals engage in an exchange relation when a product has some utility, so individual benefits can be measured by the utility of a purchase, and preferences defined by the benefit given by the availability of one increased unit of a good, which is called marginal utility.24 In doing so economists have bypassed intricate questions about the origins of value, since the aim of economic modeling was to understand what the effects are of changing preferences, and not what they consist of. So insights from reductionist approaches and from economic thought thus far do not really help in the search for the origins of value. This is caused by two inherent limitations of the utility approach, one being that utility, like quality, is assumed to be comparable across individuals and cultures (product A is definitely better than product B) and secondly that the arranging of preferences must be immutable (one individual will then always prefer A to B, ceteris-paribus). Obviously this helps when the aim is to derive mathematical and statistical models to predict the effects of macro-economic policy,25 but does not help us very much in investigating how and why consumers engage in relationships with companies and their products.

24 Most notably Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill.
25 Despite the wide recognition of this, current macroeconomic policy seems to still relentlessly believe in these
Interpretive approaches

From a consumer culture perspective, Holbrook (1999: 93) notes that the very concept of value is indeed more useful than constructs like quality or utility when defining consumer benefits (see box 2-2 for the relation between preferences, needs, values, and benefits), but that this construct has not yet been really operationalised and tested. In the quest for a descriptive framework of values that would explain consumer benefits, he proposes a classification based on three dimensions:

- Extrinsic and intrinsic nature.
- Demanding for active or reactive user behavior.
- Implying self versus others orientation.

According to Holbrook (ibid: 135) extrinsic values are objectively definable and recognisable but within a defined context (so if a car would, for instance, have been advertised as having a low carbon-dioxide emission in 1960 nobody would have understood it, whereas now it is a major selling point for most car producers) whereas intrinsic values, or valuations, are really subjective in nature and culturally defined, like aesthetic appreciation.

The second dimension refers to the amount of activity required from consumers to get access to the benefits, for instance, having a haircut is inactive, as opposed to driving a car.

According to Holbrook the pleasure derived from aesthetic values sometimes requires an active consumer rationally aware of the enjoyment experience (studying a painting), but can also require an in-active consumer (being struck by a painting). Besides the acknowledgment of consumer initiatives in the valuation process, from this dimension we see that values can at the same time be shared (studying means looking at what others said about it) and idiosyncratic (one is struck because the represented object reminds one of a personal experience).

The third dimension refers to the need of consumers to ‘show off’. In other terms the related question is, whether a product is used, for instance, to enhance one’s status, or to reduce one’s insecurity in a given social context (e.g. wearing a suit when going to a marriage) and whether the product contributes to one’s own identity perception.

assumptions, at least when one looks at the proposed (hypermodern?) solutions to the financial crisis.
Jacobs (2007: 109) mentions an implicit limitation of the model, that for instance some values, such as health, can be both internally as externally oriented (feeling good versus looking ‘healthy’); i.e. values have to be univocally assigned to one side of the dimension, whereas sometimes it can be assigned to both sides at the same time. In any case one’s self perception of e.g. being healthy is mostly informed by what is culturally considered as healthy. In other words even if we keep products (and their brands) in a closet, and never show them to anyone, the values we attach to them still have a cultural origin, and are thus shared to some extent, and defined in a social context.

Holbrook’s framework does take into account some cultural, contextual ‘filtering’ in the process of attributing meaning to values. Thomson and Troester (2002) take a more extreme stance when they note that the cultural context should never be denied when trying to understand value systems. They “propose that consumer value systems are articulated (and revealed to researchers) through the stories that individuals tell about their consumption experiences in this micro cultural domain” (ibid:553, italics added). In other words, the kinds of values that consumers perceive can only be defined by considering the cultural context of the value attribution act. So what varies are not values, but their interpretation (what does it mean) and role (if and how is it informing the perception of benefits and the formation of preferences) in relation to specific cultural frameworks of reference.

So far I have questioned the origin of values, and described two seemingly antithetical approaches to defining and measuring values. These can be grouped under reductionist and interpretive approaches. Reductionist approaches assume values to be ‘out there’ but not easy to find; statistical methods are there to help out though. On the other hand interpretive approaches imply that values cannot be measured and interpreted in a univocal way, but must always be interpreted taking into account the context of their formation.

I contend that these approaches are not necessarily antithetical. From an interpretive perspective more stable values can be considered as being ‘out there’ as well, in as much as these are univocally interpreted and shared among a relatively large group of people. In other words these approaches can be united by considering different levels of interpretation of values, or by stating the question: how large is the cultural framework of reference for the interpretation of this value? As a consequence, postmodern marketing approaches probably act upon more idiosyncratic value systems which implies that the relevance of a value proposition is only to be understood in a localised context. So the issue of hyper- versus
postmodern marketing could be refined into questions about the extent to which the relevance of the value proposition is shared among a population.

As an example, in a context where everyone uses sticks to eat using a fork might seem useless; conversely a French restaurant without forks would probably not survive for a very long time. On the other hand eating escargots with sticks might also become the ‘coolest’ thing to do in Paris. Why? Exactly because most people would not do that. In this latter case the value proposition of that particular restaurant becomes very relevant for a small group of people ‘in-the-know’. In this case the value connection between the company and some consumers is indeed strong. There are however value offers that convey a ‘warm feeling’ to a broader group of consumers, like e.g. Ferrero’s Nutella. Brands like Mercedes or Jaguar probably convey a quite univocal message, one that is shared among a large group of people. They are, however, still perceived differently in e.g. Germany or the UK as opposed to the United States, even if at its core the somewhat arrogant, status confirming nature of the Mercedes brand is probably shared by most drivers and consumers alike. So a brand might have some general and some more specific, localised connotations, or both. Or else, there are as many connotations as there are different cultural systems of reference. An example of how taste or fashion, in terms of aesthetic values, relate to different cultural systems of reference is given by Akou (2007) in figure 2-5 reproduced underneath.

![Diagram of cultural levels and aesthetic systems](image)

**Figure 2-5: Framework of cultural levels and aesthetic systems**
If a cultural system of reference is well defined and relatively stable, like that represented by a school or family, what changes are not so much the values characterising the system but rather the norms of behaviour that express allegiance with that cultural system of reference. On the other hand social interaction also has a constitutive role in the formation of these reference systems. Or better, it is by looking at social interactions that we can understand how and why these systems changed in time and place.

2-6 Individualism is not individualisation

I think one of the most important limitations of traditional approaches to marketing and even of the more recent approaches that go under the denomination of relationship marketing, is that these often consider consumers as independent and mostly rational decision makers who, at a determinate phase of the sequential buying process, are influenced by the environment. This means that peer pressure or the retail environment are influencing the decision process (to buy or to engage in a relationship) but never co-determining it. The context is considered as exogenous to the buying process. Considering contextual factors as endogenous to the decision making process means acknowledging that humans are inevitably social, and that the social environment influences consumer behaviour, but is also influenced by it. When introducing the concept of values, in section 2-5, I have mentioned that some values set external boundaries for behaviour (i.e. define what is socially accepted) others set internal, or individual boundaries (akin to ‘moral’ values). Internal values however can also refer to behavioural norms in a group setting. Values that define social boundaries can be ‘internalised’, as it were. The tension between internal and external values in the valuation process that leads to a purchase decision is reflected in a tension between tendencies of individual distinction from the group, and allegiance to that group.

In his pivotal account on fashion the sociologist Georg Simmel (1904) shows how the meaning of symbolic values is indeed inevitably linked to an inherent human paradox: the urge to belong to a group paired to a constant search for a unique identity within this group. He refers to this inevitable paradox as a dual nature of men which also explains the social function of fashion. This is, however, not a modern phenomenon since “the whole history of society is reflected in the striking conflicts, the compromises, slowly won and quickly lost,

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26 According to the premises of Actor-Network Theory (a.o. Michel Callon and Bruno Latour) not only people have a ‘performativ’ role in creating these value systems, material objects do as well.
between socialistic adaptation to society and individual departure from its demands” (ibid: 131, italics added, because I think there is no political reference yet).

As we saw in section 2-2 postmodernism discredits ideologies or the great-narratives in its premises, and advocates recognition of the particular, and thereby of individual, localised idiosyncratic values and tastes. This puts us in the midst of Simmel’s paradox: the fact that one is expected to, or should27 have independent, original, supposedly unique preferences and identities posits a limit to the very freedom of choice on which the concept of individualism is based. A scene from Monty Pyton’s movie Life of Brian may be most explicative of this paradox. In the scene the following conversation takes place among voices from a crowd standing under Brian’s balcony while Brian is wrongly taken to be a messiah and wants the crowd to leave: 28

Brian: You are all individuals!
Crowd: Yes we are all individuals!
One person: I’m not an individual!
Crowd: Shut up! Yes you are...

So it seems to me that trying to define the very term individualism leads to a form of circular reasoning. Looking at individualism from the perspective of the street, it strikes you how choices people make in their consumption behaviour are also quite similar indeed. So despite the alleged fragmentation and particularism of tastes, despite markets and trends advocated by postmodernism (see box 2-1), if it is true what Fourier says that “consumers do not choose brands, they choose lives” (1998: 367), then it is also true that many people choose very similar lives. Maybe because consumption ‘choices’ are not as independent, or even not as conscious as one would like to see them. 29

Despite the ongoing myth of the consumer as an independent, fully conscious and rational decision maker, in the last decades a lot of attention has been given to the study of communities, or communal behaviour in cultural studies in a commercial context as well (e.g. Muniz and O’Guinn 2001). This renewed attention towards communities is supported and

27 Baumann (2005) in particular considers the inevitability of this paradox as detrimental to human well-being, as it leads to a kind of postmodern stress.
28 Taken from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQqq3e03EBQ But I would strongly advise to watch the whole movie.
29 Recent insights from the fields of neuromarketing or neuroeconomics (e.g. Ariely 2008) suggest that consumption choices are probably much more instinctive and unconscious than we have long believed.
reinforced by the rapid formation of a plethora of online or virtual communities (Rheingold 1993) where interaction is not necessarily physical.

In the field of consumer behaviour exponents of the Consumer Culture Theory group\(^{30}\) assume that consumers do not attribute value to products and brands independently but do so collectively. When Algesheimer and Gurau (2008: 232) for instance say that “through [...] shared consumption practices social structures are permanently and dynamically created, maintained and/or transformed”, they argue that consumption is a communal practice that contributes to establishing social cohesion. The role of consumption and brands in this continuous and communal process of value attribution or production of meaning (what I called signification in chapter 1), is to modify or to reinforce the perceptions of the self or identity. This role has been broadly acknowledged (e.g. Holbrook et al.. 1982, Firat 1991, Holt 1997, Elliot 1998) as well as empirically explored (Fournier 1998). So should we not consider consumers as individuals anymore?

Some refer to the myth of individualism and individual choice as a typical North European view, strictly related to pragmatic ideas of progress, improvement, and control (Cova and Cova 2002: 595). In such a society relations between individuals are more formal, and hence explicit. Compared to this ‘Latin’ societies rely more on informal structures, and recognise the inevitable social nature of individuality itself. The very ideas of individualism and independent decision making are also strongly related to modernistic ideas of control and progress.

But if individualism and individual choice are myths, with whom should the marketing managers who embrace the relationship marketing concept develop a relationship? With a community perhaps? For some markets this might present some problems since:

- the behaviour of such a community is not always equal to the sum of the behaviour of its components;
- these communities are often not easily identifiable, i.e. their borders are not always as easy to define;
- these communities seem to have an life of their own, as group preferences (fashions) often seem totally aleatory.

\(^{30}\)See also http://www.consumerculturetheory.org Holbrook (2005). This is considered a pivotal overview for this school of thought combining insights from critical studies, sociology, cultural studies, postmodernism and advertising in consumer behaviour.
Maybe it helps to consider markets microcultural systems of reference, or just microcultures. This implies a fundamental shift from considering markets as groups of people, to considering markets as being ‘reference worlds’ for consumers. One implication is that, when doing marketing research, one is not interested in who consumers are, but rather in what keeps consumers together, i.e. the representation consumers have (in a particular moment) of an imagined community they belong to in terms of behavioural norms, and related consumption choices.

One of the practical implications of this observation is that marketers should not go around more or less arbitrarily defining markets on the basis of alleged (invented or latent...) needs, but look at and understand microcultures embedded in social contexts. Indeed, as the recent ‘fashion’ of ethnography as the method in market research shows, this perspective is also picked up by practitioners, but adopting different, more descriptive market research methods does not necessarily imply having a postmodern marketing approach.

2-7 Inter-ago ergo sum

Most marketing books tell marketers to define and look for who ought to buy their products, implicitly assuming that, when potential consumers are identified (in average terms), their behaviour is to some extent predictable. Sometimes this is true, especially for product groups that are more stable in terms of demand like dairy products or basic garments.

In chapter 1 we saw that Lambin (1991) considers marketing a discipline that follows the premises of classic economics (section 1-3). Classic economic theory is based on the ideal of a transparent market composed of perfectly rational decision makers. In marketing this ideal is reflected in the definitions and descriptions of ‘target markets’ or ideal consumers. Postmodern approaches to marketing, however, take unpredictability of consumer behaviour as a given; that is why I defined these approaches as more adaptive. Therefore the difference between hyper- and postmodern approaches to marketing can also be understood in terms of a different view on markets. This is akin to two different approaches in sociology which are maybe best espoused in the following words by the French sociologist Michel Maffesoli (1996:57). A hypermodern view on markets is one where “dogmatic a-priori […] preconceptions proliferate, which according to a logic of ‘ought’ will try to mold the masses

31 Here I intend the market as defined from the demand perspective of needs to satisfy, as opposed to definitions of the market in terms of products (jeans trousers) or production technologies (denim finishing).
32 Maffesoli does not use the terms hyper- and postmodern in these qualifications though.
into a ‘subject of history’ or some such commendable and civilised entity”. In a postmodern view a market consist of a “shapeless mass, at once moblike and idealistic, generous and wicked, […] which in a quasi-intentional way has as its sole ‘project’ its perdurability in existence”. According to Maffesoli these mobs are driven by ‘puissance’, a kind of vital survival and, in a sense, spiritual and spontaneous force. Maffesoli calls these social entities ‘neo-tribes’ thereby observing a return to (or better, a rediscovery of) pre-modern times.

The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2000) talks about ‘liquid modernity’ and refers to mobs as ‘swarms’. Just like bee swarms human swarms are ephemeral, temporary, and anything but predictable. Most of all they have no leader, they just follow imagined ‘moving targets’ instinctively. In fact birds/bees most probably do not follow the orders of a bee/bird-leader with a plan, but imitate their neighbour. Still Bauman warns us of the consequences of these congregations’ compulsory nature when he claims that 1) the speed at which they move is increasing and 2) if one cannot follow the movements one is at risk of being marginalised or stigmatised. 

Hypermodern attempts to control and manipulate consumers imply an unproblematic application to aggregate quantities of linear, mechanicistic models that hold on a particular level. These approaches might be effective when people behave like a military battalion with defined and rather stable values and norms of behaviour. Considering markets as swarms, however, poses questions to this approach, since control implies predictability and the behaviour of swarms is anything but predictable. This leads us to considering the concept of Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) in relation to markets. As Anderson (1999: 219) notes in a CAS “order is an emergent property of individual interactions at a lower level of aggregation”. According to this view consumers and companies are agents that are necessarily interdependent since “agents co-evolve with one another. Each agent adapts to its environment by striving to increase a payoff or fitness function over time […] each

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33 Maffesoli mentions Naples as a case in point (p:50). This reminds me of a description of Naples of Curzio Malaparte (in La Pelle, 1949) where he shows how the driving force of the city’s culture, attractiveness and it very survival are the result of a capability to mistrust hierarchies (the various foreign rulers of the city, up to the Americans during the Second World War). Self-organisation becomes the art of survival (l’arte di arrangiarsi) and subversiveness, irony and play are of paramount importance as these are the means of resistance (think of the Commedia dell’ Arte that finds its origins in Naples).

34 Lipovetsky in his book Hypermodern Times also refers to a kind of liquid-modernity, however this author does not envisage dramatic consequences for ethics as Bauman does.

35 And that is where macro-economics, a politically driven ‘invention’ of the thirties (Keynes only showed limitations of the extant classic model), has its manifest shortcomings, but now more than ever informs economic policy. The current financial impasse may be a good example of hypermodern attempts to solve a crisis.
individual's payoff function depends on choices that other agents make” (Ibid: 220). The interdependency of agents (consumers) that comprise the system makes manipulation and control difficult to achieve, among others because very small changes in a system (e.g. the introduction of a new product, or a variation on existing products, or a new application for existing products) can have quite disruptive effects because of ‘feedback loops’ or ‘returns to scale’ that amplify otherwise small mutations (Waldrop 1993).  

In the context of consumption-behaviour such a mutation can also consist of a contingent shift of preference from one brand to another by one individual. It is for this reason that a style, or fashion, can be considered as the result of social self-organisation and co-evolution. In fact subcultures in the 70s adopted clothing and related musical styles, as lifestyles are most probably not a rational, calculating choice among alternatives. In other words, aggregate consumption choices are complex, as they are often the result of serendipitous, insignificant, unobservable, and sometimes infinitely small changes and events. By the same token John Lennon probably did not have a very strong preference for the - at the time quite widespread - round glasses he always wore, but that shape of spectacles became the icon of a generation. The idea that slight preferences can lead to large effects on an aggregate level is also stated by Granovetter in his famous work on the strength of weak ties (1973: 1377) when he claims that: “the personal experience of individuals is closely bound-up with larger-scale aspects of social structure well beyond the purview and control of particular individuals”. This means that markets are entities that show tendencies of spontaneous self-organisation, as implied by a CAS approach.

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36 In layman’s terms, ‘snowball’ effects.

37 The rapid adoption and instant popularity of a product like the I-Pad of Apple may be an example of this as in the perception of most people the product quickly became a ‘must have’ (about 1 million items sold 28 days after its introduction according to Steve Jobs, see www.wired.com/epicenter/2010/05/apple-ipad-reaches-one-million-sold-twice-as-fast-as-iphone retrieved February 2012). The functionalities of the product are not really new, but the way in which these are presented are. Small events like the making of videos showing infants using the device might have contributed considerably to its success (http://innovateordie.com.au/2010/05/12/toddlers-are-accelerating-the-apple-ipad-diffusion-of-innovation/ retrieved February 2012).

38 In Zablosky and Moss Kanter (1976) the distinction between lifestyles and subcultures lies in the conscious character of a subculture as opposed to a lifestyle. I dispense with this observation by noting that the line between consciousness and unconsciousness, to generate intentional behaviour, is very difficult to draw. Moreover I am interested in the effect of behaviour, whether it is conscious or not.

39 For instance, a slight preference for similar neighbours can lead to segregation in cities, which is not necessarily the result of overt racism but rather the cause of it.
Some sociologists take self-organisation pretty seriously when arguing that bottom-up, ephemeral, and apparently insignificant relations or ties, like those with a sports club, or a cult product fan club, or just a group of regularly gathering friends, are fundamental in promoting social stability and therefore much more significant than we would suspect. The Dutch sociologists Duyvendak and Hurenkamp (2004) recognise the role these kinds of informal institutions have in contemporary Dutch society and refer to Bauman’s ‘swarms’ as ‘communities light’. They, however, do not define a measure for the strength or ‘thickness’ of these communities, nor do they explicitly recognise the role commercial enterprises or brands have in the formation and cohesion of communities-light. In the realm of marketing Bernard Cova builds on the insights of Maffesoli when he recognises the ‘linking value’ of some brands that ‘keep together’ neo-tribes as it were; i.e. these brands have a cohesive nature (Cova 1997). Since the beginning of the new millennium several marketing scholars have been investigating the role brands have in ‘keeping together’ neo-tribes, and refer to these kinds of brand-centered aggregations as ‘brand communities’.

Looking at a few of the most mentioned definitions (see box 2-4 for an overview) I find that the following are the most interesting characteristics of group behavior in the context of the development of preferences:

- spatial or other identifiers are not a necessary condition for the existence of a community, reference brands and products can vary
- self-organisation, i.e. no top-down selection or rules
- feelings of longing and belonging

What do these characteristics imply for the emergence of a value connection between brands and consumers?

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40 Munoz and O’Guinn (2001) and McAlexander et al. (2002) define the terms, and more recently Bagozzi and Dholakaia (2006) have tried to identify antecedents and consequences of brand-community allegiance. Interestingly the latter study attempts to predict purchasing intentions in the context of a brand community, thereby suggesting hypermodern attempts to manipulate postmodern brand communities.
Box 2-4 Swarms, neo-tribes or communities-light?

The postmodern preoccupation with the local has recently led several sociologists to consider local communities, instead of society, as their locus of attention. An exhaustive overview of the several community-related concepts is beyond my scope. I will reproduce those I found mentioned most in relation to consumption behaviour here. Whether the community is ‘light’ or ‘heavy’ (cfr ‘communities light’) its members need signs and symbols as identifiers. The brand as a sign is such an identifier.

*Swarms* (Baumann, Z. 2005: 76)
“In a liquid modern society of consumers the *swarm* tends to replace the *group* □ with its leaders, hierarchy of authority and pecking order. A swarm can do without all those trappings and strategems without which a group would neither be formed nor be able to survive”.

*Communities-light and heavy* (Duyvendak and Hurekamp 2004)
“By ‘communities light’ we mean groups one can freely chose to belong to or not, without serious consequences. A person can chose to be member, or be prone to do so by the social environment, family or residence. The aim or nature of these communities is not necessarily democratic […] By ‘heavy communities’ we intend communities the membership of which does have more serious consequences”.

*Brand Community* (Munoz & O’Guinn 2001: 412-413)
“A brand community is a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand. It is specialized because at its center is a branded good or service.[…] Like other communities, it is marked by a shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility […] the brand, therefore, should have a central and prominent place in the discourse of modernity, community, and society.” (Italics added)

*Neo-Tribes* (Cova 1997, p. 300)
According to Cova neo-tribal members are characterised by “a local sense of identification, religiosity, syncretism, group narcissism.” Cova stresses the fact that what distinguishes tribes from neo-tribes is that the latter lack spatial terms of reference. “Tribes attempt to revive the community archetype of the village or the district, but these communities are not solely definable in spatial terms; some use the latest high-tech means of communication (microcomputers, Internet, fax) in forming virtual tribes. Face-to-face encounters and co-physical presence are no longer compulsory.” “they can be held together through shared emotions, styles of life, new moral beliefs, and consumption practices. They exist in no other form but the symbolically and ritually manifested commitment of their members.”

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41 “Onder lichte gemeenschappen verstaan we de groepen waar je als individu zonder ernstige gevolgen van los kunt komen […] Je treedt toe op eigen of op andermans verzoek, niet per se als gevolg van een actieve keuze, het lidmaatschap kan ook bepaald worden door je kennissenkring, je familie of je woonplaats. Ze hoeven niet democratisch van aard of doelstelling te zijn.” …“Onder zware gemeenschappen verstaan we die verbanden waar men niet zomaar lid van kan worden en waarvan uittreding wel serieuze gevolgen voor individuele leden heeft.”.
How brands and microcultures intertwine

Some brands thus manage to establish a strong value connection, not with individual consumers but with microcultures. How can we qualify these relationships? Or better: what do brands do with microcultural systems and what do these do with brands?

According to Cova et al. (2007: 6) the relationship neo-tribes have with a brand can be characterised along two dimensions: market appropriation (shaping the value proposition) and market annexation (spreading the value proposition). The first dimension basically means that a group of consumers can either coherently spread the company’s intended values, or reinvent the value proposition adding original values to it. Market annexation can be interpreted as the extent to which consumers (some of them) are engaged in activities related to the brand, i.e. an indicator of fan-activity. The term fans, or fandom do not appear in the writings of Maffesoli, Duyvendak or Bauman, and it is also true that not all brands have active fan clubs, they are actually more of an exception than a rule. Brands that people love, however, like Apple, Mini or Harley Davidson, do have fans. So to understand the nature of the value connection or relationship between brands and consumers we also have to take into consideration ‘fanaticism’ (see box 2-5 for a series of definitions related to fanaticism). For a brand to have fans is important as they are very committed, loyal customers who honestly talk about the brand and can also provide a company with reliable, hopefully, valuable information about products and marketing initiatives.

The term fanaticism typically brings an irrational attitude to mind, an addiction that might lead to unexpected and maybe unwanted consequences. Some refer to the term as something positive and not necessarily detrimental to one’s psychological or mental ‘health’ (e.g. Chung et al., 2008, or Lewis 1992); in fact fans typically feel ‘sorry’ for those who are not fans and thus unable to understand their passion and enjoy it (Smith et al., 2007: 91). One very broad definition is that of people who spend “much time and effort to engage in a particular form of activity” (Passmore 2003: 213). Fandom also implies a proactive attitude, deriving from a process of identification (social construction of identity) that leads to strong brand commitment and loyalty (Moutinho et al. 2007: 670). Chung et al. (2005) find that fanaticism is just a particular form of loyalty, which is not based on rational (i.e. calculative) but rather on emotional drivers.
Now we have accounted for the varying degrees to which individuals are engaged with a brand, let’s shift our attention towards considering microcultures and their relations with brands again. The model of Cova et al. gives us a framework to understand fandom in relation to different degrees of group-fanaticism. This framework is based on two dimensions: 1) The more or less active role consumers have in shaping the value proposition (consumers adding values) and 2) the more or less active role consumers have in spreading the value proposition (consumers boasting the brand). In figure 2-6 I have put some examples of brands which could represent these four relationship types, in box 2-6 I explain why I relegate them there.

**Box 2-5: Definitions of Fan-related terms** (Thorne and Bruner 2006: 53)

**Fan**: A person with an overwhelming liking or interest in a particular person, group, trend, artwork or idea. Behaviour is typically viewed by others as unusual or unconventional but does not violate prevailing social norms

**Fanatic**: A person with an overwhelming liking or interest in a particular person, group, trend, artwork or idea that exhibits extreme behaviour viewed by others as dysfunctional and violating social conventions

**Fandom**: A subculture composed of like-minded fans, typified by a feeling of closeness to others with the shared interest

**Fanaticism**: The level of investment one has in the liking or interest of a particular person, group, trend, artwork or idea.

**Materials** are the objects of a Fan’s activity. These can be:

- **primary**: the original particular person, group, trend, artwork or idea that is the focus of the fan’s interest, or
- **secondary**: materials that relate to or are derived from the primary materials. These materials may or may not be officially approved by the producer or source of the primary materials.
Spreading the value proposition

- Shaping the value proposition

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Figure 2-6: Brands and their relation with neo-tribes

Box 2-6: How brands and microcultures intertwine (based on Cova et al., 2007:6)

Consumers spread the meaning of the brand as intended by the company, but are not boasting it

Commodity providers like T-Mobile might stimulate users to share tips and tricks about how to deal with the company, but the values are mainly functional and probably univocal in their significance despite the repeated attempts of these brands to create a ‘group’ or ‘social’ brand.

Consumers re-invent the meaning of the brand, but are not boasting it

In the 60s the Clark’s classic shoe was adopted by the left side of the political spectrum. From the 80s on it stands for a more moderate view on liberalism; this shoe model still has a very defined popularity today (Wipperfurth 2005).

Consumers spread the values intended by the company and are boasting it

The Harley Davidson brand is known for the gatherings of brand fans, and a look at the way people dress (jeans, leather vests) shows that they are quite consistent in spreading the

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42 In my experience some telecom companies attempt to build a more affective personal relationship (one-to-one marketing!) with customers by e.g. sending out automated birthday cards. However is it questionable whether this enhances loyalty in a fundamentally commodity market with little possibilities of differentiation based on symbolic values. After all I do not notice many people ‘showing off’ by boasting their telecommunication or energy provider.
company’s values.

Consumers re-invent the values of the brand and are boasting it

Finally the brand **Lonsdale** was famously adopted, at least in the Netherlands, by extreme right-wing xenophobic groups, and then by anti-xenophobic groups alike, this way becoming a beacon of social discourse.

Fandom is one important source of customer loyalty, but loyal consumers are not always fans. By the same token, saying that a brand manages to create and maintain a strong value connection with some consumers does not necessarily imply that these consumers are engaged in group activities. How do we account for this? In my discussion of the individualism paradox in section 2-6, I have argued that human beings have two opposite tendencies (as Georg Simmel noted in 1904): standing out versus belonging. Now consider for instance the difference between the brands Harley Davidson and Rolex: in figure 2-5 I show that Harley Davidson fans boast the brand but are not changing its value proposition, but we could claim the same for a brand like Rolex. The value proposition of Rolex implies exclusivity, i.e. by wearing it consumers want to ‘stand out’ by excluding others. In doing so, however, these consumers seek allegiance with other people who also want to ‘stand out’, but Rolex consumers are not spontaneously engaging in group activities, unless they have a Swan sailing yacht and take part in the Rolex regattas. But then Rolex is not the motive for the gathering and a different sponsor might not have changed the nature of the regatta. In the terminology of Cova we could say that Rolex tries to find an entrance in the luxury sailing neo-tribe.

### 2-9 Glue Value: The strength of small signs

In chapter 1 I have used the term ‘signification’ to refer to marketing as a process where signs acquire meaning. These signs represent benefits for consumers, and benefits must be interpreted according to reference value systems. We have also seen how choices, including purchasing ones, reflect a tension between individual and group values, but that group values can be internalised, and become one’s own. Next we have seen how value systems, which we called microcultures, change and show properties like self-organisation (i.e. emergent values). And that brands can act as triggers of change, of evolution of value systems, which means brand-values and value systems might co-evolve. What we need is a concrete way to detect and qualify the role brands have in relation to microcultures, i.e. the nature of the value
connection. That is the Glue Value of brands (see figure 2-7) and the Glue Value can be considered as an answer to the following questions:

- How big, or small, is the cultural reference system for interpreting the benefits?
- Does the brand as sign trigger some form of grouping behaviour?

If we put these questions⁴³ on respectively the vertical and horizontal axes of a matrix, the Glue Value of a brand would resemble the diagonal line drawn in figure 2-7.

![Figure 2-7 The Glue Value of Brands](image)

Imagine a consumer is confronted with a familiar brand like Starbucks. First he will have a ‘warm’ feeling, due to the recognition of the brand’s meaning – good coffee, relax – and secondly the brand may awake feelings of belonging, a common ‘home’ where peers can be found who value good coffee and a cosy environment to ‘chill out’. However, identification with the brand (the first point) does not necessarily activate consumers in a social context; when that is also the case the Glue Value of the brand is strong. The other way around is also true, when the brand does activate social behaviour then cultural identification must be there

⁴³ So regarding e.g. the value of ‘health’, this distinction resolves in two kinds of questions, a cultural one: ‘what does it mean to be healthy?’ And a social one: ‘How important is it to look healthy?’
(as one does not feel activated by an unknown brand) which also shows how social dynamics rest on cultural ones.

Assuming that a value connection is established with some consumers, the question in relation to the HyPo dimension presented in section 2-2 is whether this connection is defined in terms of the company’s intentions and assumptions regarding consumer value systems (or needs) or by consumers. Most probably the answer lies somewhere in between but where exactly? And how did that happen? Concerning this second question I will look at marketing as an activity of valuation in the next chapter.

In table 2-1 I present the Glue Value qualifier which should help us define the nature of the value connection. It is important to know here that the Glue Value of a brand is something different than its strength, as there are brands that do not trigger grouping behaviour and are easy to understand, but are still strong in terms of recognition, profitability, or market share (i.e. they have a high ‘brand equity’).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glue Value in HyPo Class:</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic Relevance</strong></td>
<td>Efficiency &amp; Effectiveness</td>
<td>Recognition &amp; Status</td>
<td>Belonging &amp; Reciprocation</td>
<td>Differentiation through belonging</td>
<td>Differentiation through contribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural context</strong></td>
<td>Meaning is shared worldwide</td>
<td>Meaning is shared in a specific society</td>
<td>Shared in a specific society and historical context</td>
<td>For some consumers meaning is localised</td>
<td>For most consumers meaning is localised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group triggering</strong></td>
<td>No triggering</td>
<td>Standing out from the crowd</td>
<td>Massive gatherings</td>
<td>Occasional smaller gatherings</td>
<td>Frequent smaller gatherings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Examples of related brand values</strong></td>
<td>Faster, Cheaper, Vitamine-rich Lower cholesterol ‘Improved’ Reliable</td>
<td>Wealth Perfection Social achievement Sex/Nastiness ‘Cute’</td>
<td>Autenticity ‘Tongue—in—cheek’ humour Ideological values (environment, health) National identity Popular sports</td>
<td>Marginalisation Controversial issues Offense</td>
<td>References require knowledge of a quite small group of ‘those— in—the-know’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2-1 The Glue Value Qualifier.44

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44 Gatherings mentioned in the group-triggering row can take place in virtual and physical spaces.
The thread of this chapter should be evident from this table. Starting above, the HyPo classes reflect the five types of marketing approaches presented in section 2-2. Going down we find the cultural and social dimensions of the glue value (respectively horizontal and vertical in figure 2-7). Moving towards the right side of the qualifier, the cultural system of reference for interpreting the benefits implied by the brand becomes smaller, and the brand’s values are determined by consumers for a larger part. In other words: the more on the right side of the system, the higher the levels of self-organisation. Whereas as one moves towards the middle the value connection also reflects the companies’ intentions, and the value system of interpretation of the benefits implied in the proposition is shared among a larger group (cfr box 2-1 points 2 and 3 respectively: fragmentation and reversal of consumption and production).

For example: arguably both Mercedes and Nutella are strong brands, but what is their Glue Value? Next I will give an approximate example of how I have reasoned in order to assign brand to a specific HyPo class. A Mercedes is mostly considered reliable, and it also conveys status. Concerning the grouping function, people driving a Mercedes are, to my knowledge, not eager to salute each other, quite the opposite possibly. Nutella awakens more friendly feelings. Its value proposition implies ‘grown-up kid’ and ‘genuine’ in most countries, but it is striking how at least in Germany and the Netherlands consumers often think this (Italian) brand is national. This is probably due to the fact that they consume most of the stuff at a younger age, so the context of interpretation of the Nutella brand is more localised than that of Mercedes, but at the same time broad, depending on which brand-values we consider. Nutella though, does trigger group behaviour (albeit only in some countries and for few consumers if compared to its market share) as consumers organise ‘Nutella parties’, a ‘Nutella Day’ or a competition for the longest Nutella-sandwich.\footnote{Nutella cookbooks have been written, and other ‘secondary materials’ are available. An interesting account of the phenomenon is given by Cova and Pace (2006).} I would thus insert Nutella into category HyPo IV and Mercedes into category HyPo II.

Going back to figure 2-6, the Glue Value of Harley Davidson seems quite high. Even if in this case cultural references to interpret the brand are widely shared (‘Easy rider’, USA, Freedom) the brand definitely triggers grouping behaviour more than Nutella does, and the company stimulates that as is shown by the availability of gadgets (cfr primary and secondary materials in box 2-5) related to that brand. For Lonsdale the cultural references necessary to interpret
the brand are localised. As a matter of fact the ‘hijack’ (misinterpretation) of the brand was not widespread, as it was the Dutch youth adhering to that system of values that was called the ‘Lonsdale youth’ and one needed to be ‘in the know’ to understand it. As such the brand used to trigger grouping behaviour for a while, because boasting it would inevitably relegate one to that group. Several brands do have very localised connotations but do not necessarily trigger grouping behaviour. So I would relegate Harley Davidson to HyPo IV and Lonsdale to HyPo V.

After considering Nutella, Marmite is a British product that is comparable to Nutella as the British have a strong national identification with it and according to the producer it helps kids to grow up, just like Nutella. However, despite the ongoing attempts of its current owner, Unilever, for example through the organisation of events like the Marmite Love Parties, it does not trigger as much grouping activity as its Italian counterpart (at least in as much as I can find out after a search on the internet). I would put it in HyPo I. Therefore the question arises what were, or are, the reasons for these different levels of activation around the brands, and the answer may (also) lie in the use of different marketing approaches. This is indeed the main contribution of this research: to understand the relation between the kind of marketing approach of a company and the Glue Value of its brand.

2-10 Conclusion

I have started off this chapter by showing what hyper- and postmodern marketing approaches imply. After having suggested a possible taxonomy of marketing approaches ranging from hyper- to postmodern ones, I have given an overview of contemporary marketing approaches and ranked them along this dimension. I found that the main contribution of postmodern marketing to marketing thought is the acknowledgment of an active consumer role in adding values to the company’s value proposition and therefore I started looking for a way to rank values on the HyPo dimension.

47 A Google-images search of the brand gives an overview of the alleged ‘subtle signs’ leading to a high Glue Value.
48 Please note that there is also variation within a HyPo class.
49 This shows how the cultural environment is the determinant for the development of taste. Mark Wearing, Marmite’s plant manager, reports: "Our research shows that if you haven't been exposed to it by the time you're 3, it’s unlikely you'll like it," (Hoge W. “Burton-on-Trent Journal; Long Live Marmite! Only the British Could Love It” NY Times, 20 January 2002.
50 The original formulation of the HyPo dimension must be credited to my supervisor, Dany Jacobs.
After having justified why the concept of values is key to our discussion on consumption choices, I have discussed several approaches to defining and measuring values. I came to the conclusion that the best way to look at the variation in values is to consider several, co-existing value-systems I have named microcultures. In the discussion on values we have also seen that personal and group related values can clash, and therefore I have further explored the concept of individualisation to find out it is a myth, i.e. individuals exist, individualism does not. This implies that establishing one-to-one relationships between companies and consumers can be considered a conceptual myth as well. Brands build relations with microcultures that can even have a performative role in their establishment, which means brands and their markets, as microcultures, can co-evolve. Having defined cultural systems as static though, we needed to account for these co-evolutionary tendencies. I did so by showing how according to premises from both sociology and complexity theory communities show emergent features, i.e. they self-organise their directions and directives, just like a swarm of bees does for that matter. Combining the concepts of values and related benefits with the definition of microcultures and with insights about their evolution has yielded an instrument, the Glue Value qualifier, that basically allows us to trace back whether the value connection between a brand and consumers is determined by both, and to what extent.

By developing the Glue Value dimension and Qualifier (its operational definition) I have tried to integrate several perspectives instead of factoring out variables. The present is more akin to an interpretive than a reductionist approach to research. In section 2-5 I have shown how these are indeed apparently opposite approaches to measuring values, but that the interpretive one can also be said to include the reductionist one. To consider a value as pre-existent (in our minds) and its meaning objective is tantamount to saying that its meaning is shared in a broad cultural context, or else: if it is true that values are emergent, it is also true that they can get ‘fixed’ in our genetic set-up for quite a long time.

In the next chapter I will come back to the distinction between reductionism and interpretivism, or between positivism and interpretivism, or between quantitative and qualitative, etiological, and descriptive approaches, to try to eliminate simplistic dichotomies and argue in favour of a more encompassing stance in research.

I have not yet elaborated on marketing as an activity of valuation that leads to a specific Glue Value category. Since I have started the chapter by commenting on hyper- and postmodern marketing, what I also need to do in the next chapter is to give an operational definition of
marketing activities, before relating these to the Glue Value of the brands, in a more general framework and to justify my choice of four specific case studies.