Modern marketing in disguise: creating value connections between companies and consumers
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Chapter 6    Mini: a small friend or a big brother?

6-1 Introduction
In this chapter I have included two case studies because that gives us the opportunity to directly compare them with each other. One could argue that a MINI is the same as a Mini, or the other way around, but we will see that is not the case. Although the brand values of the more recent version of the car had to resemble the old ones, the different marketing approaches used to present and support the image of the two brands Mini and MINI made all the difference in terms of the resulting kind(s) of value connection(s). Comparing these gives us the opportunity to distill marketing’s contribution to the establishment of a specific type of value connection further. From its very introduction in 1959, the Mini has always been able to generate a grin on the face of anyone who has to do with it: it is a brand with a high ‘smile-effect’. Other popular cars produced in those years also have a smile effect, think of the Fiat 500, the Citroen 2CV, the VW Beagle. In the last decennium some of these models have been renewed and reintroduced. In 2001 the Mini was re-introduced as MINI by a new owner, BMW, with the aim to exploit a growing product category, that of small luxury but fun cars. When this happened Mini already had an established image, or images. BMW could thrive on these, but incurred the risk of being associated with a brand that would be too far from the company’s identity. For that reason the Mini was not positioned as a BMW, by BMW itself. Consumers however often refer to it as the BMW-MINI, and by doing so refer to some fundamental differences between the two versions of the car. In fact BMW changed the whole car except for the basic design and a few aesthetic features like the shape of the grill (air-intake), the headlights and the door handles. The new model had to develop the same kind of appeal as the previous one, but the previous one had a much less defined positioning. The marketing of BMW has been quite remarkable indeed and successful as well. Arguably though, the MINI seems to have a different personality than the Mini. In some ways it became an adult, so much so that BMW is now introducing several new models of the car which definitely depart from the core concept of the 60s. This shows that BMW has been able to somehow detach the brand from the product, and to such a degree that marketing is now more important than before to shape people’s perception of the car.

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127 BMW changed the name of the car formulating it in capital letters. In this chapter I will refer to the BMW-Mini as MINI and to the former model as Mini.
The marketing of BMW has been aimed at infusing life into the car, to give it an ‘authentic’ personality. To do so it leveraged very much on differentiation, i.e. a different marketing approach for a different car and different cars for different people.

So if the old Mini gradually became the means for individual expression, BMW made it a means of individual expression from the start. The approach of BMW therefore seems more modern, and the question is if the glue value of the MINI is comparable to that of the old one, and if not where and why these differ. Therefore we first have to look at what this glue value consists of, secondly at the marketing activities around the brand and thirdly at the image of the car as it evolved through the years.

In section 6-2 I will start with some background concerning the history of the car. In sections 6-3 and 6-4 I will show how consumers do have a very special relationship with the Mini, which somehow asks to be manipulated, enhanced, adopted, changed. I will try to distill the product’s traits that lead to this kind of product-consumer interactivity. After having clarified which of the product’s features were determinant in making it attractive, I will investigate the role of marketing in the creation of this image in sections 6-5 and 6-6, concerning respectively the periods before and after BMW’s take-over in 2001. In section 6-7 I am going to look at the image of the car today. For a further understanding of exactly how the car’s images came about I will compare the glue, or symbolic, values acquired by the Mini and MINI, and the marketing activities related to the two versions of the car in section 6-8, i.e. the degrees of required (company) and actual (consumer) input concerning message activation, values-added and peer-activity. In section 6-9 I am going to conclude by showing how, through the years, branding has gained importance in defining the perceptions of the Mini and later MINI brand, and how this is related to marketing, as a signification and valuation process where consumers are also involved.  

128 Following the numbers in brackets refer to data to be obtained on request.
At the end of the 90s the German car maker BMW had to face a strategic move. In the face of consolidation in the automotive sector and of the necessity to expand its products range, it had two options: to introduce a new BMW or to buy existing brands. The CEO of the company at the time, Mr. Pischetsrieder, was not only an anglophile, but also nephew to Sir Issigonis, the much celebrated designer of the first Mini. This might have contributed to the decision by BMW to buy Rover (at the time owned by British Aerospace), a brand in line with BMW’s image and with an extended and established product and brands range (a.o. MG, Austin-Healey, Triumph…). Shortly after, BMW sold several facilities and divisions to among others Ford, and kept a few assets amongst which the Mini brand was one.\textsuperscript{129} In 2001 BMW introduced the new MINI in the United States of America. According to BMW executives this move was quite a gamble. For starters the Mini had been absent from the US market from 1968 for security reasons,\textsuperscript{130} which meant it had to be built up more or less from scratch, and this implied some risk. BMW’s managers clearly stated that the brand should be conceived as totally distinct from BMW\textsuperscript{131}[6][7][8]. Despite this the new MINI\textsuperscript{132} is often referred to as the BMW-MINI (e.g. the Wikipedia dedicates a separate page to the BMW-MINI) and from the statements of the same managers we understand that the association with BMW was, and now certainly is, important to underline the enhanced qualitative features of the car: “But I could well imagine BMW customers buying a MINI COOPER as their second or third car”\textsuperscript{[7]}. Even if the brand was not established yet in the USA, that was different elsewhere. Burkhard

\textsuperscript{129} www.aronline.co.uk/index.htm?whydbbrf.htm (September 2011)

\textsuperscript{130} The car’s security has been an issue for many years, mainly due to it’s size; among others the MINI City was considered by the magazine Which as “one of the ten worst cars for safety in 2007”; despite the investments made by BMW, which now claims it to be “one of the safest cars in this category”\textsuperscript{[7]}. The ‘old’ versions were deemed relatively unsafe by the UK department of transport and had even been withdrawn from the North American market (early 80s from Canada) for not complying with the U.S. safety regulations of 1968 [1].

\textsuperscript{132} The use of capital letters was introduced by BMW to distinguish the old and new models.
Göschel, one of the managers responsible for the re-introduction at the time, said that “the MINI will add an entirely new dimension to the segment of small premium cars. Quite simply, this is due to the fact that MINI cars are different - they are full of character, full of expressiveness, cars with their own *brand personality*”[8 Italics added]. The Germans would not so much create a brand, but adopt one, and apparently they were aware of the risks involved in associating a strong established brand personality like that of MINI with their own. They adopted a grown-up personality as it were. Where did this person come from?

In 1957 the head of BMC, Sir Leonard Lord hired a Greek engineer, Sir Issigonis, and gave a simple but effective instruction: “God damn these bloody awful Bubble Cars. We must drive them off the road by designing a proper Miniature car” . The Bubble, I think, refers to the shape of most European small and functional cars, like the Volkswagen Beetle, the Citroen 2CVB or the Fiat 500 (all cars with a round roof), but it might also have referred to the small cars made by BMW. The aim of BMC was to create a fuel-efficient and economic car for the working class family, which could seat four and use an existing engine. When introduced in 1959 the car was very cheap indeed: £497 for the Basic version and £537 for the De Luxe. The price had to beat the Ford Anglia, which was priced just above £500.

BMC was most probably not thinking in terms of symbolic or emotional branding as Sir Issigonis meant the car to be functional above all. As a result of this enterprise a car was produced, which very soon was the beloved transportation mean of the milk-deliverer, but also of the jet-set. So what was it about the Mini that led to the establishment of such an iconic brand? To start with some features were surprising given the price of the car, and that gave it a ‘smart but fun’ personality.

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133 Proud *not* to be a designer…but in other circumstances also defining himself as such.
134 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mini_June 2010
135 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dKfAuaspFdQ : Business Nightmares: Doomed Designs, BBC
136 Allegedly the Ford corporation dismantled a Mini to understand how they were able to make any profit on it, concluding that it was impossible. Later on officials of the British Motoring Company admitted they were only making money on the later special versions of the car (www.miniworld.uk.com).
137 2nd car of the century after the Ford T, according to a broad panel of experts, http://www.nytimes.com/1999/12/24/automobiles/this-just-in-model-t-gets-award.html (July 2011)
6-3 Live me, protect me, drive me

When BMW presented the new MINI in the Paris auto show of 2000, it introduced the worldwide campaign ‘Let’s Motor’ and stated three key values: live me, protect me and drive me. The formulation implies that the car itself is speaking. Why did BMW use this formulation? Apparently the car did have a distinct brand personality, but as a matter of fact many Mini drivers already had very personal relationships with their car. The following comments, taken from a video that celebrates the 50th anniversary of the brand, suffice to show the point [3]:

A German journalist: “It’s a car, but it also plays tricks with us” or “I loved it more than my girlfriend”

A Ukrainian female student: “My Mini as a soul, I’m totally convinced of it”

A Japanese designer: “I want to say goodbye in the evening and in the morning it says hello, it’s a living creature”

The comments refer to both the old and new versions of the Mini, however from an interview I had with MINI lovers in the Netherlands it seems that owners of old Mini’s do not salute owners of the new ones, and vice-versa, which would mean that the old and new Mini’s have different personas and reference mentality groups. But before we look at who these are, let’s look at how the human connotations came about in the first place.

Consumers report that ‘this car is begging you to have fun’ or ‘the interior is whimsical, its like hey I am glad you are here, I am glad you are driving me, let’s be friends’ or ‘Useful, Fun, Well built and looking good.’ And ‘It’s like a little puppy dog wagging its tail, begging for attention’. As I said before the intention of BMC was to create a car that would be cheap, easy and comfortable. In order to achieve that Sir Issigonis had taken an existing engine and built it transversally instead of longitudinally. Besides creating more space inside, this meant more weight on the front-wheels and thus increased stability. The result was not only a small and affordable car, but also a car which was fun to drive. The fun-factor is

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138 ÉBLOIUS-MOI” (“LIVE ME”), ”PROTÈGE-MOI” (“PROTECT ME”), ”CONDUIS-MOI” (“DRIVE ME”) in French, because literally taken from the presentation of the Mini at the Car fair in Paris in 200x[m6]

139 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-W0KicB8pA&NR=1 (July 2010)
important in the success of the brand. This aspect was reinforced when a friend of Sir Issigonis, Mr. John Cooper, decided to adapt the car for rally-driving, something Sir Issigonis did not appreciate very much, because it was supposed to be a practical car above all else. The car eventually won three subsequent editions and one later (1967) of the famous Monte-Carlo rally from 1963.

In the words of the rally drivers who actually drove the car to win the Monte Carlo rally for three consecutive years: ‘The handling, the unique way to get around the corner, front-wheel drive, it is very grippy’ and ‘It could do things that no other car could do’ [3]. The power/weight ratio and weight balance of the car were apparently optimal, but also the closeness to the street gave the impression of going faster, thus enhancing the fun, feeling like a rally driver without having to be able to drive like one (what would later be referred to by BMW as the go-kart effect).

![Picture 6-26: The old Mini maybe startled and innocent, the new one is more aware of its charmes.](image)

To reproduce these properties was indeed one of the biggest challenges for BMW, as a company executive says: ‘Giving the driver optimum driving pleasure was of particular importance to us in developing the MINI COOPER’[m7]. So it is quite evident that the functional properties of the car largely contributed to creating its irreverent image. And irreverence can be associated with puppy (see box 6-1), but also with other human attributes (as from picture 6-3). To keep the same look was also a challenge for BMW; the German company quite radically renovated the car, and allegedly kept only the front headlights and grill.
Box 6-1: People, Pets and Cars

Hewer and Brownlie (2007) ask themselves what it is about cars in particular that invites consumers to look for linkages with peers, specifically through online communities (including the biggest MINI-fan club, mini2.com). They find among others that the aesthetics explain indeed why some cars are more ‘debugged’ or de-signed than others. The peculiar look of a car becomes a locus of cultural signification: “…there is more to aesthetics than meets the eye as aesthetics is the territory upon which it is feasible to speak and theorize car aficionados as akin to everyday designers for whom the discussion boards exist as key reference points” (Hewer and Brownlie 2007: 112). This can be better understood in relation to the concept of identity, or identification. Modifying the car not only gives it personality, but also a supposedly unique one that makes it identifiable for and with the owner (i.e. giving the owner a sense of identity). The identification process in this manner not only happens by adhering to a cult brand or product, but also by deconstructing, or ‘decommodifying’ it (Hewer and Brownlie 2007: 107), among others as a form of resistance towards mainstream ‘pre-packed’ consumer culture, resistance often framed as style (ibid: 108). They do not explain however what these aesthetic characteristics are. As a matter of fact people have an obvious propensity to project human connotations on most objects, animals and divinities, but somehow cars are more susceptible to be treated as humans than other products (Windhager et Al. 2010). Typically the headlights resemble eyes, the grill the nose, the air intakes the mouth. A Walt-Disney concept that is very successful nowadays, Cars indeed’, may be quite explicative in this respect, as you can see from picture 6-4.

Chris Bangle, a former design director at BMW, states in a documentary about designers and their relation with objects: ‘You, as a person, can have lots of different faces, but with a car, you can only have one face. When you put on that face, it’s there forever. It becomes the car’s expression.’ And for a Mini this expression is to be startled. That is, in its most innocent interpretation the Mini’s round shapes remind one of a young child, or better a puppy asking for being debugged.

140 Ibid.
141 In picture 11-2 above the headlights and grill probably refer to other attributes, but I think here there is more intertextuality, i.e. it takes some thinking to get to that interpretation.
142 ‘The Mini Cooper always looks surprised to be where it is. Especially when it ends up at Costco and the driver needs to load in a weeks’ worth of groceries.’ http://ideasinspiringinnovation.wordpress.com/2010/05/09/cars-and-human-faces-they%E2%80%99re-more-like-us-than-we-think-3/ and Ibid. note 10
6–4  Come to me

Generally speaking people will want to keep their distance from a grown-up Doberman, but a startled young puppy teasing you to play asks for physical contact and interaction. And so did Mini.

Already in 1963 (the car was introduced in 1961) there were professional companies such as Radford transforming the car to one’s specific taste (see box 6-2).

Box 6-2: Ringo Starr’s Radford Mini de Ville

Ringo Starr bought a very clean two-tone Radford Mini de Ville from Beatles' manager Brian Epstein on June 15, 1967. Radford Minis were custom cars built by Harold Radford Coachbuilders, LTD, from 1963 to 1971. Radford transformed standard Minis into luxury vehicles, adding things like leather upholstery, wood trimmings, revised gauges, Rolls-Royce-inspired two-tone paint schemes, and other luxuries. Ringo’s particular Mini was a hatchback, and it is said that he transported his drums in this tiny machine. This car didn’t stay with Ringo for long; he sold it after just two years.

Radford catered the Ringo Starr version of the Mini to several celebrities who really wanted this new icon of their generation. John Lennon, Peter Sellers (who used it in the movie ‘A shot in the dark’ and even bought one for his wife), Marianne Faithful, George Harrison, Michael Nesmith all owned a luxury, customised version of the car and Marc Bolan famously died as a passenger in a Mini clubman in 1977. Other manufacturers like Hooper (a Rolls-Royce coachbuilder) and Wood & Pickett also made custom versions of the car.

Picture 6-28: The psychedelic version that appeared in the Beatles movie Magical Mystery Tour owned by George Harrison on the right. On the left the BMW remake for his partner Olivia Harrison. Which car does the dress fit best?
Apparently the Mini occurred at the right time, in the right spot, just like Mary Quant’s mini-skirt (see picture on the left). Paul Smith, a British apparel designer, who linked his name to the car on many an occasion (actually one special edition of the car was named after him) claims “It was designed for practical reasons, but picked up because it was lovely, interesting, cute" and referring to his own reasons to own and drive the Mini: "Many people think I drive a big sports car …but I just need to go through traffic and park…its very cool, I love it!" [m3]. Others found that "At the beginning it was ridiculous, absurd, too small and different" [m3], but after 1961 "...something strange happened, it was picked up by urban trendiers, or early adopters" or else "Middle class urban rationalists."[3].One example of how the car was literally picked up by users are the many threads present on the internet after a search key is entered like ‘mini+fit+people’. Apparently 28 is the maximum amount for the MINI, which was even recorded in the Guinness Book of Records, in China, in 2008.143 Several users try the gimmick themselves, never really exceeding 22 people. The Mini though, apparently reached 24 people.144 This challenge is, however, not unique to the Mini, other small cars invite it as well, like the Smart145 (14 people).

Picture  6-30: How many people fit in a Mini?146

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144 http://www.igopeople.com/g/6056the6mini6club/posts/31076how6many6people6can6fit6inside6a6mini6 Retrieved September 2011
One of the main characteristics of the movement of 1968 was a sense of revolt against hierarchies and pre-defined authorities in favour of bottom-up playfulness, fun, and aesthetics, and the Mini (literally!) embodied just that. But did the car do that all by herself? Or did she get some help?

6-5  Mini-Magic

In 1963 Peter Sellers ordered a Mini from the coach-builder Hooper to be featured in the second movie of the Pink Panther sequel, 'A shot in the dark'. The coach-builder took the model (costing four times the basic one) and launched it as a special model. That Peter Sellers endorsed the car in the movie 'A shot in the dark' seems due to his own love for the car, however, according to the marketing manager of Austin-BMC at the time, addressing celebrities to position the brand was an intended action (see picture 6-8).

**Picture  6-31: The Mini had to be the celebrities’ car.**

It is true as well, that the car often plays a conspicuous role in giving personality to the celebrities themselves. It takes little thought to conclude that the 'startled' personality of the car fitted Inspector Clouseau’s personage perfectly. Another very startled British personage endorsing the car was, of course, Mr Bean.

**Picture  6-32: The Mini is associated with British Humor. Left Peter Sellers, right Rowan Atkinson.**

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147 http://www.supercars.net/cars/1705.html but also other websites confirm this, as the car was recently for sale and figure at the 1999 Goodwood festival.
Allegedly Rowan Atkinson wanted the car to feature in the series as from 1990, and the car became a sought-after actor in other British movies as well. The makers of the movie Four Weddings and a Funeral wanted to recreate the famous Italian Job movie, given that in their previous movies Minis were also endorsed, but since BMW was taking over the brand at the time, and since the movie makers could not feature the new model of the car in the movie, they abandoned the project and Hollywood took over. So the car was endorsed in movies to convey 'British ness', and BMW consequently used movies as a mean to personify the car.

It is quite surprising how soon the car became iconic, given that when introduced it was intended for everyone, designed to appeal to consumers at a practical level [14, p.229]. A closer look at the marketing of BMC-Austin shows, however, that the car was positioned amongst the young and successful, uninhibited upcoming class.

Picture 6-33: Typical Mini ads from the late 60s.

Next to the celebrity endorsement of Mini (picture 6-9) a look at the advertisements that the BMC group used to promote the car in the 60s, already gives us a quite specific idea of who the car was meant for. More precisely, if we look at a few advertisements for the car dating back to the end of the sixties, we can see some consistency in the portrayal of for instance young, at the time very sexy, people being amazed by the car or going to the beach with it. At the same time the focus was on the functional properties of the car. The slogan ‘Mini – Magic’ was repeatedly used to convey that (see picture 6-10), and the very first time the car was presented the marketing manager was dressed like a magician.

149 http://www.theitalianjob.com/piazza_legacy.htm
Next to celebrity endorsement the marketing means of the time consisted mainly of print advertisement. A number of the ads that I analysed are reported in the appendix 6.150

When going through these advertisements a number of issues become apparent:

- Several other brands, like Michelin, Dunlop, Lucas Bright Eyes (headlights), and others used the Mini to sell their products. A practice that was more common in those years, but today the MINI is used as a 3-d billboard as well, see picture 6-13.
- Many ads contain some tongue-in-cheek (British…) humor. However, this is also present in Italian, Spanish, French, and German ads.
- There is quite some variation in the slogans given a consistent format/background.
- The car is often portrayed red (‘the red mini ad’) or yellow; white when the message is just functional.
- Some elements are recurrent, like umbrellas.
- The images are often colourful, as is the clothing worn by the figures, reflecting the modern fashion style of the time.
- Many pictures of the 60s and 70s contain blonde women with a mini skirt. She is smiling, not arrogant, friendly. The intended associations with slim, modern, mini-skirted star Twiggy are quickly made.
- The car is often presented as a love, more than a lust, object but there are some sexual references already in the 60s. ‘You never forget your first mini’; the car is a partner.
- Many women are driving, of all ages. Women’s emancipation was also a trend at the time. In the Spanish ad the mini clearly states it’s opinion that youth should not be oppressed.
- Particularly later in the 70s and 80s the car is sometimes portrayed in sub-urban areas.

We can conclude from this brief analysis that it may not have been by mere chance that, as the designer Paul Smith says: even though "At the beginning it was ridiculous, absurd, too small and different...something strange happened, it was picked up by urban trendiers, or early adopters " [m3].

Testimony to Mini’s move to becoming fashionable or trendy is also its international appeal. The car has been produced among others in Spain and Italy (by Innocenti, see picture 6-11), to be able to fulfill demand in these countries.

150 http://www.malaysiaminilover.com/forum/mini-timeline-t17.html
Picture 6-34: The Italian Mini does not neglect her origins.

In 1997 the small Mini was ‘big in Japan’ [m13, p233]. The car was already grown-up as even the Japanese had already ascribed some specific traits to the brand’s personality, which had been attributed separately to different models of the car in the 80s (see box 6-3). It trived on the fact that Rover decided to introduce the car overseas, but they changed the Mini logo for the, for the Japanese prestigious, Rover logo (see picture 6-9) [3][m18].

Picture 6-35: The Japanese version of Mini with the Rover logo.

By doing so it wanted to reposition the car in a higher, ‘premium’ segment that would later be its positioning also when BMW took over the brand.

Box 6-3: Mini, skirts and Fashion

Associations with fashion and style are not rare in the descriptions of the car and brand by users. This has specific reasons. One of these is that another icon of modern times was also named Mini and had allegiances with women’s emancipation (see picture aside). BMC exploited this growing fashion phenomenon; from the late 70’s the colours available had fancy, exotic names such as: Farina Grey, Tartan Red, Speedwell Blue, Clipper Blue, Cherry Red or Old English White. Many were the different variations of the car’s technology like the breaks, gearbox, suspensions and the engine, which were of course also due to the many technical possibilities and developments of the time (see Timeline in the appendix). Already in 1976 the first Mini Limited edition was introduced, in green and white with a golden body stripe, featuring reclining
seats and face level ventilation. Several other limited edition Mini’s will follow\(^\text{151}\). During the 80ties every year, if not a bit more often, a new model was introduced based on specific themes. These include for instance the London collection, with the Mayfair, Ritz, Park Lane, Chelsey, Piccadilly models; a Colours collection including the models Red Hot, Jet Black, Rose, Sky; the Speed collection including the Flame Red, Racing Green or Checkmate versions; or even a Designer collection, with the Designer and Paul Smith models. Just like the mini-skirt the Mini became a fashion statement.\(^\text{151}\)

Despite its international appeal the Mini stayed very British however. In the words of the Rover manager, mr Darzinskas, the Mini was offering “genuine Britishness, traditional design, traditional materials…”\[^{m18}\, p\, 180\]. Moreover Simms and Trott \[^{m13}, p\, 233\] report that “the (Mini) brand image has developed from a number of specific associations” and that “The (Mini) brand serves a function in social identification with customers wanting to associate themselves with the aspirational 60s and celebrity lifestyles …a cool, fashionable and stylish image”. This international British ness that appealed to the Japanese image is what is sometimes referred to as New Britannia. Characterising the concept is among others it’s permeable nature \(\text{Goodram 2005: 59}\): very British and yet multinational. \(^{152}\)

So from the advertisements and strategic decisions of the British Motoring Company we can conclude that the first version of the Mini was ‘dressed up’ and placed in specific contexts. The car was meant for everyone in functional terms, but driving a Mini meant being up-to-date, adhering to a system of values that was emergent, represented by specific celebrities and typical for the younger generation.

The car also asks for interaction and a few times this interaction leads to developing a new aspect of the car’s personality. Mechanic John Cooper wanted to use the car for the Monte Carlo Rally without the approval of Mini’s engineer (and Cooper’s acquaintance) Sir Issigonis; Peter Sellers wanted to use the car in a movie. London being the ‘place-to-be’ in the 60s (e.g. Brazilian and Jamaican dissidents were living there) the beat-generation adopted the car as its icon. What BMW wants is to capitalise on these value associations, as the Belgian marketing manager of Mini says “we consciously chose for keeping the old values of Mini, which once were ‘intrinsic’ in the product.”\[^{8}\]. This last statement is interesting, because if

\(^{151}\) Until the 90ies the : 1000 STripey LE ‘76, 1100 Special’79, Sprite’ 83, Studio 2’90, Neon ’91, Cabrio ’91, Open Classic 92, Italian JSU 92, Rio’93, Tahiti ’93, Sidewalk (Tartan) ’95, Equinox ’96, ERA Turbo’90…

\(^{152}\) Which is different than international, which would be just exported British ness. The Commonwealth comes to mind, a more permeable approach the British had in their colonies, as opposed to the commercial and overtly exploitative approach of e.g. the Dutch.
these were once intrinsic in the product, did they get out somehow? And were BMW executives on a mission to refill the car?

6-6 ‘Smoke gets in your eyes’

When I was not yet busy with this research, looking out of the window of a train in Berlin, I saw a large advertisement on one of the modern ‘plattenbau’ buildings featuring the front of the MINI; as I passed by smoke came out of the car’s headlights. I have mentioned this experience in classes to explain how an advertisement can become surprising and thus memorable just by building in an unexpected three-dimensional element. What I did not yet get was that the car got alive through such a billboard. Another example of how the MINI gets alive are the many videos that have been posted on the internet. A search using the keywords MINI Cooper on youtube.com (not on google!) delivers some 63,000 videos. To give but one example, one video starts with two people driving on the German ‘autobahn’ when a Mini passes by and starts lifting on two wheels and engaging in pirouettes. The video seems to be amateurish, which makes the whole scene realistic and thus even more fun to watch. James McDowell, head of North American operations for the company, reports “People buy MINIs because they really want to have more fun in their days,” and that therefore “We want everything about our marketing to fit that.”[21].

We have seen that aesthetic and handling properties were important factors in defining the fun side of the car’s personality. According to a recent study on the brand perceptions of the new MINI “The importance of the product itself to the success of this brand can …not be underestimated”[m13 np234]. Of course BMW designers understood this, as they retained the key anthropomorphic elements of the old model: the headlights and the grill. But apparently that would not be enough as marketing was clearly aimed at giving every car a distinct personality, according to the specifications of the owner. This had to be achieved by means of unconventional communication. Kerri Martin, marketing communications manager for MINI at the time of its introduction, appointed a new advertising agency, i.e. Crispin Porter Bogusky’s, and commenting on the briefing notes “This is a momentous time for us and the MINI brand. We are not just launching a new car but a new sector and virtually a new brand… owning a MINI will be like no other motoring experience, full of inherent excitement and product depth”. So according to BMW the introduction in the USA was aimed at creating a new driving culture more than a new brand experience (as also Holt & Quelch 2004 notice).

153 But also smaller details like the handle to open the rear of the hatchback version, or the ‘hooks’ that close the doors.
It is, however, also true that according to BMW executives, the initial aim of selling 20,000 units did not justify the big investments in TV advertising. This meant looking for a buzz. In the words of the man responsible for the introduction of the car, Mr. Pitney: "Rather than implement the traditional advertising blitz associated with launches, the company relied on "out-of-the-box" thinking and grassroots tactics to generate groundbreaking buzz," and "While low brand awareness in this market presented a challenge, it also gave us the luxury of starting with a clean slate". As to the reasons for such an approach Mr. Pitney comments: “Our whole credo is: if another car company can do it, we ought not. You will continue to see us breaking conventions and doing things differently than anyone else in the industry. It helps to differentiate the brand and speaks to our brand's unique characteristics. We don't have big budgets compared with other small car manufacturers, so we have to stand out.”[23]. So, in the words of BMW executives the reasons for the unconventional marketing were 1) the tentative introduction that did not justify big investments and 2) the need for differentiation. However, in the same interview mentioned above Kerri Martin mentions that the initial briefing of the marketing agency was “…all part of the worldwide MINI idea pool." [19]. So I think the re-introduction of the car was actually more thought-out and long term oriented than would seem from these interviews. The great advantage of the unconventional marketing that was getting popular at the time was, that new technologies allowed for three dimensional features and interaction. Next to changing USA’s driving culture, the aim of BMW’s marketing was to infuse life into the new model of the car. Three-dimensional features allow the car to actually ‘get alive’ and digital interaction allows consumers to personally relate to the car (see box 6-4).

In the briefing for the very first campaign to introduce the car, the marketing agency reports.154 “The role of our communication was not about giving the car personality, but rather about giving MINI the space to demonstrate its genuine personality. We wanted to get people grinning again” and talk about “advertising that would bring to life MINI's iconic status for the current generation”.

If personalisation of the product was one key aim of BMW’s marketing activity, at the same time the car should not be an unpredictable irreverent person, after all, security and care are also key values and these imply reliability, which means consistency and predictability of behavior. Particular attention to consistency in the aesthetics of external communications can

offer a means to convey that. Design is not only aimed at surprise but also at recognisability and consistency, which convey reliability. The aesthetics surrounding the car are particularly evident from the advertisements. According to marketing-blogger Paul Williams Mini’s advertising works because: it gets the attention, has a clear, memorable message, is brand appropriate, locally/audience relevant and remarkable.

The layout of the advertisements was conceived in order to generate a very recognisable background which would at the same time allow for flexibility in the development of the content of the message and according to the comment on a designer’s blog it sorted out the desired effect, as: “The real art is how they apply these simple graphic tools—the perfect combination of unique applications and clever copy that never ceases to amaze and inspire me. How could a designer, in love with a designer car, possibly ask for more?”.

I would add that all this praise is a consequence of the following:

- MINI uses a recognisable graphic style, with brightly coloured boxes around text and the same typeface, or font, in all its communications.
- All marketing from MINI is written in the same style, or 'tone of voice', using cheeky, intelligent humour, to make MINI feel gutsy and fun. It all has the same personality.
- At the heart of the brand is the car itself, but the context in which the car is presented talks more about the car than the car itself does.

So if anything, it seems indeed that BMW has been very much busy trying to influence the perception, the image of the MINI. Given, among others, the consistency of this approach in time and space (years and countries) it must have been a very worked out strategic marketing planning exercise. For this reason what is interesting is that with respect to the first Mini the second one got a lot of help. If the brand values of the first one were, for a large part, the result of a combination of the aesthetic and functional properties of the car, as well as of being at the right moment in the right places, the second MINI ‘tried hard’ to be someone. One could argue that BMW has been too busy positioning and developing the MINI and thereby lost part of its primary appeal, which was to be great fun accidentally. On the other side this

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155 http://mini.co.uk/html/about_us/mini_education/marketing.html (March 2010)
156 http://www.mpdailyfix.com/mini-cooper-ad-fires-on-all-cylinders/ (March 2010)
157 http://mslk.com/reactions/mini-i-know-its-you/ (March 2010)
might have sorted its effects, given the success of the car. But what about the results in terms of image? Or else: when this marketing plan was conceived, did BMW really start thinking from the car’s persona? Or from the persona’s who should be driving the car?

Box 6-4: MINI's marketing: The product from object to subject

BMW’s marketing of the MINI has been aimed primarily at conveying the car, and not just the brand, as a personality: The car becomes the messenger. In the words of the marketing agency WCSR “The MINI adventure ads were an inspirational interpretation of our brief; scripts in which MINI is quite literally a hero - not a vehicle for the driver's heroism”. BMW has many marketing approaches, but most promotional activity is based on ‘place based marketing’, which means placing the car in unexpected (mostly urban) contexts. Next I will explain how the car becomes a celebrity, teases and gets personal.

The car as an actor
Already in the 60s the Mini was the protagonist in several British movies and the use of cinema and video is mentioned on the MINI-BMW webpage as a key element of external communications. The use of movies to promote the Mini goes beyond just product placement, the car is actually a leading character in the movie, an actor. One, or better two, of the maybe most successful movies featuring respectively Mini and MINI as main actors are the first and latest versions of ‘The Italian Job’, of which a video game has been produced as well (see picture aside).

Not only in movies and videos is the car an actor, but also in the images portrayed in the advertisements. As one can see from the picture below the car is treated as a ski-vacation companion rather than a means of transportation.

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158 “Rolls-Royce and Mini give BMW largest ever quarterly profit” The Telegraph, 3 November 2010.
159 See http://www.imcdb.org/vehicles_make-MINI_model-Cooper.html for a comprehensive list
**Teasing**

For the launch of the new clubman a short mysterious movie was proposed ‘The other MINI’ and posted on the company website; related advertisements portrayed a bourgeois family posing for a picture with a punk boy as a young son: MINI as the ‘black-sheep’. Another example of teasing consumers is what BMW calls ‘undercover’ MINI. As the company website reports: “Three new MINIs were launched together in early 2007. People who had registered an interest online were sent an email inviting them to see a sneak preview of the new models. The email explained that the MINIs were ‘under cover’ but that you could release them by pressing ‘the right buttons’. The email contained a link which allowed people to click through to a web page where computer generated MINIs were tearing around in a warehouse under a giant piece of silk. When you pressed a button the MINIs dramatically burst out into full view”. Only registered users could see it and eventually book an early test drive.

In 2005 the ‘stealth’ counterfeit campaign started, the diffusion by the counter-counterfeit commission in the USA of a DVD-video that warned consumers for fake copies of the car.

In another ‘tease’ campaign BMW’s advertisement agency decided to tell consumers that robots would be made of the cars.

In a 2002 Playboy spread, MINI allegedly posed for the iconic Playboy Centerfold, which was photographed by an actual staff photographer and given final approval by Hugh Hefner himself [19] although I was not able to find any further reference or image of these pictures. This is a good example of announcements made by BMW to create a myth around the brand. Creating myths is another tantalising marketing attempt.

**Getting personal**

The ads on billboards along the street are first of all acting upon and enhancing the functional properties of the car, like the handling, size, and agility. However, even advertisements can get personal. If you own a MINI, and fill in an online questionnaire, it is probable that in the United States of America a digital billboard gives you personalised messages. The cars in the ads talk to you, with “an ever-changing array of unique, personal, playful and unexpected messages…The messages are personal, based on questionnaires that owners filled out: ‘Mary, moving at the speed of justice,’ if Mary is a lawyer, or ‘Mike, the special of the day is speed,’ if Mike is a chef.” Still according to one of BMW-MINI’s brand managers “Since more than a third of Mini owners have named their cars, the messages will sometimes refer to the car by name” [21]. However I have found no evidence that many people actually named their MINI.

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160 For more extended teasing campaigns of MINI see https://thisisnotadvertising.wordpress.com/category/promotion/ okt. 2011

161 29-01-2007 “Billboards That Know Your Name” NY times,

162 For a most comprehensive overview of the ads see e.g. http://libraryofmotoring.info/miniprintads1.html

163 Even if I must admit I did not tell everyone my last car was named “The Lady”.

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6-7 The MINI mind is set

At its introduction the Mini was underpriced, so much so that in the UK the Mini story is considered one of the largest business blunders ever (how to build a great brand and lose money on it…), according to an old BMC executive in an interview in a BBC documentary on iconic brands that made no money. One of the reasons for the fact that such an iconic brand did not make any money was that the culture of BMC was not to be aware at all of the costs involved in producing the car, but rather to produce as many cars as possible. The main aim was to beat Ford (the Anglia model), to cater to as many people as possible, and to prevent the popular German models (‘bubble cars’) to gain market share in Great Britain. According to Simms and Trott (2006) the Mini “appealed to people of all ages and all walks of life”, and has been described by consumers as ‘classless’ [14] as the perception of the typical owner is also likely to be anyone, “from celebrities to students” [14p. 233].

Despite this very, I would say, democratic positioning, the car very soon acquired specific connotations in the minds of consumers, associations the company leveraged in the 80s to introduce special edition versions (see also box 6-3). These ‘special collections’ were related to specific themes like Design (a.o. Paul Smith Mini), Sports (Wimbledon and rally versions) or more generally British ness (the London collection, Mini Mayfair or Chelsey). Still, according to the Mini history website mentioned above, these initiatives by Rover eventually led the Mini to generate some profit. As we saw, Rover was also responsible for the introduction of the car in Japan, where it had to gain a ‘premium’ status [m18]. Here Rover was already portraying a more specific positioning, one that BMW developed further as it were.
According to a study on the MINI image by Laverick and Johnston (1997 p. 181), by then the re-introduction of the brand in Japan was a well thought-out marketing exercise of conveying specific brand values to a specific target audience. So before BMW, Rover already felt the need to reposition the brand as more exclusive in order to ask for a higher price. In the words of Rover’s Mini manager Nicki Darzinskas, the car was able to offer “genuine Britishness, traditional design, traditional materials and, perhaps most importantly, the opportunity to personalize their purchase and stand out from the crowd” [13]. So it was a car for a crowd that increasingly wanted to stand out from the crowd. The marketing agency responsible for the introduction in the USA, comments in this respect that: “the new MINI is a premium car for a new breed of style conscious motorists who want to downsize without losing status”.

That is not necessarily the case with the old Mini, even less so today. Picture 6-13 shows an image from a gathering that occurred in the Netherlands in 2006, were the challenge was to gather as many old Minis as possible for a good cause. The video shows also the most disparate customisations of the car, and how engaged fans are.

![Picture 6-36: Dutch TV-news reports about a 1000 Minis gathering for a record challenge and a good cause in Drimmelen, The Netherlands in 2006.](http://video.google.nl/videoplay?docid=6872084942575022517&q=MINI+COOPER+CLASSIC (Oktober 2011))

I have noticed how owners of the old Mini salute each other on the road as a sign of mutual understanding, but owners of the two different versions do not. Simms and Trott (2007: 305) also find in their interviews with Mini and MINI owners that “…it became clear that among

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many old Mini owners there was a strong, what was described by some as an, ‘anti new-Mini’ feeling’. Concerning the different perceptions of the brand they further comment: “old Mini owners value the brand’s classic status more than new Mini owners. New Mini owners place a significantly greater emphasis on the Mini’s reliability and safety, as well as its stylish appeal, than old Mini owners” (Ibid: 303). This may be indicative of the current different ‘mindssets’ associated with the brand, but it is also true that users of the MINI could be more resembling the users of the Mini in the 60s, since the car was new, modern at the time, and reliability and safety where not primary concerns like they are today.

Most drivers of the new car, at least from our interviews, ‘always wanted to have a MINI’, so buying a MINI still is, as it was, mostly an explicit emotional choice, but this emotion now has less to do with historical, inherited values of the car, and more with safety, reliability and an overall perception of style, or being stylish.

All the same one could argue the opposite as well: with BMW it is not consumers looking for the car anymore, but rather the opposite. In the words of Mr. Joachim Milberg, Chairman of the Board of Management of BMW AG: “Through the MINI brand we intend to appeal to new, young groups of customers for the BMW Group - customers particularly attuned to the young and emotional character of the brand. People, whose individualist, open lifestyle is perfectly reflected by MINI. Trendsetters will simply love this car and the MINI brand as a whole.”[7] And at least for the USA, BMW had very clear ideas about who these trendsetters are and what they like (see the overview I made of the magazines where the car has been advertised in the USA in appendix 6-3). Even more overtly the head of external design at MINI-BMW declares: “Wir followen kein trends, wir machen unzere eigenen trends”[3]. So the ‘trendsetting nature of the car is now sought after explicitly. Jack Pitney, responsible for the introduction in the USA, reports that "It was important for us to identify the MINI customer…since MINI's appeal is not limited to a demographic boundary. Instead, MINI customers have similar psychographic qualities - what we call the "MINI mindset" and our marketing had to be relevant to all of them. The youngest MINI buyer is 15 and the oldest

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165 It is arguable if keeping the aesthetics of the car did good to its overall performance. One quite well-known and respected British television celebrity and conductor of Top-Gear, a very successful car-test TV program, Jeremy Clarkson reports the following about the new Mini clubman: “Looking for good things in a car that torque-steers like a wayward horse and has no boot, no rear visibility, a silly door and a ridiculous cruising speed “(110mph) is a bit like looking for good things in a piece of fish that’s dry, tasteless and bony. Unfortunately, after a week, I have decided it’s one of the worst cars in the world. About as desirable as a packet of dung or a can of worms. Truthfully? I’d rather have a goat”. Besides already in the 70’s the car had a reputation of turning unexpectedly when using the brakes (I personally risked my life a couple of times with my mother’s car, and my parents confirm it was a ‘known’ problem…).
According to a representative of the marketing agency company from San Francisco, that suggested the interactive ads, BMW: “wanted to intensify the already strong *tribal* feeling among MINI owners and stimulate their desire to support the brand”.

According to a Harvard instructional case study (Holt & Quelch, 2004) the target group at the time of introduction consisted of three basic segments: those fitting the Mini-*mindset*, those that were enamoured of coupé sports cars (remember the Monte Carlo Rally and Sport models of the car), and those that were already devotees of the original Mini. However, soon after only the first segment was left, as the BMW Press Forum reports that “The MINI target market, although initially envisioned primarily as luxury sports car enthusiasts, was upon closer examination determined to be customers that had adopted the “MINI Mindset” (Ibid). Still according to BMW this target market is much wider and more diverse demographically than originally thought, and the MINI mindset comprises the “similar psychographic qualities” common to them all, despite an age span from 15 to 97 years.

The stylish and fashionable appeal of the brand is also very much related to femininity. MINI marketing officials were aware of the pre-eminent role of *women* in the success of the old Mini, and thrive on that as well. During the training program meant to introduce the MINI to dealers in the USA, according to BMW executives: “it was essential that dealers were aware of the differences involved in selling a fun, cult car to a younger, *largely female* market” ; the Belgian marketing manager is aware of the fact that in the organisation of the Mini challenge he should not forget women.

What becomes clear is that as the Mini grew up, it was transformed from being a car for everyone to being a car for a selected group of ‘trendsetters’; this is confirmed by the previously mentioned study on the perceptions of the old and new Mini’s by Simms and Trott (2007) as well as by users. A journalist and user, Andres Stahl, eloquently admits, referring to the MINI: “After all, the Mini is a great car, but it's also *not* a car for everybody.”

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167 “MINI USA Launch Exceeds Expectations - Jack Pitney Credits Innovative Marketing, Enthusiastic Dealers On Road to Success” 2003
Box 6-4: MINI's Customisation (im-) possibilities

BMW wanted to leverage on the inherited success factors, but had clear ideas with regard to the positioning of the car as well. The product kept iconic elements, like the headlights, the grille, and other details, but changed in terms of safety and even size. One of these inherited factors was the tendency that owners of the car had to customise it. As Trott and Simms comment [m13 p231] “Key product attributes and benefits are important associations with the brand, in particular…its ability to be customized”. Some reporters stress the fact that it is a case of mass-produced individuality as “Only two in 100,000 are likely to have the same specifications”[4 and 5]. Typically, the first mini was produced with the roof in a different colour than the body, as a reminder of Rolls Royce, which already allowed for a greater number of colour combinations than other producers were offering. In 1961 the Austin Se7en models were produced in two tone paint incorporating a black or white roof. From 2005 it is possible in the USA to design your own roof completely through a web-based module, allowing for individual artistic expression 168. Nevertheless several people comment on the fact that BMW put clear boundaries to these possibilities. Blogger Frank Piller notes “All choices seem to be perfectly balanced to deliver neatly tuned combinations fitting the Mini brand image as seen by its corporate parents” 169 and “After a year of hearing customers ask for it, MINI is finally allowing for matching C-pillars (see picture) on the Clubman. However it’s with one big caveat - you can only get matching C-pillars if you order Pure Silver or Midnight Black” [12] 170. In Italy (fourth market for MINI after USA, UK and Germany) it is also possible to customise the roof of the car in collaboration with the film-chemical company 3M. Not all designs are possible though, one can add elements suggested by the company, or else use designs that have been voted by users and taken into production. The designs must be feasible, contents acceptable and ‘not against company policy’ 171. Also third party companies still offer customisation means or customised models (e.g. www.mossmini.com, Renova in the Netherlands).

6-8 Fill in the blanks

In the previous sections I have shown how the value proposition of Mini, or put differently its personality, developed in time and how the owners of the brand, those of the cars and the cars themselves have played a role in the signification process. We have also seen that this signification or valuation process has lead to a strong value-connection: the Glue Value of the brand is high. But in terms of our HyPo dimension (reproduced below in table 6-1), is there a difference between the Glue Value of Mini and MINI?

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170 http://minicoopernews.com/?p=56#more-56 (June 2010)
171 “Terminata la personalizzazione e avviato l'ordine si dovrà comunque attendere l'approvazione da parte di MINI, sia sulla fattibilità tecnica sia sui contenuti, non accettati nel caso di utilizzo di loghi registrati, di immagini o testi offensivi, volgari o contrari alla politica aziendale. Una volta ricevuta la conferma, il progetto va in produzione.” www.mini.it (August 2011)
When the Mini was conceived by BMC and engineered by Sir Issigonis the positioning was ‘value for money’, i.e. HyPo I. The car was not intended for a specific segment or target group, or else the benefits of the car appealed to everyone: space, speed, easy handling. From the advertisements of the 60s though, we have seen that, soon after the introduction, the company was already looking for associations with extant elements from current trends, i.e. HyPo III. What happened was that the car soon ‘jumped’ to HyPo V. In fact consumers, helped by mechanics, changed the value proposition to make the car an icon of a new discourse that was thriving in London in the 60s. Why? In section 6-4 we have seen that the aesthetics of the car, together with its functional properties were mainly responsible for the hijack.

Later in the 80s and 90s Mini marketing executives started exploiting the associations consumers had with the car. As I have shown previously these Mini’s were more expensive; the aim probably was to be able to ask for higher margins, margins that otherwise would go to companies specialised in modifying the car to a more luxury version. That leads us ‘back’ to the HyPo IV category.

As we saw in the previous section BMW repositioned the brand leveraging on the existing associations consumers had with it, just like the latest owners (British Leyland-Rover) did, but starting by defining different consumer groups instead of different car personalities. As a

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172 Too good value for too little money actually, which was also possible because of substantial subsidies given to the industry at the time.
result the car became a sort of ‘status symbol’, a status gained by pertaining to what Richard Florida would characterise as the ‘creative class’ comprised by the “Leaders of twenty-first century society” (2002: 315). This places the MINI back to Hypo II.

So one preliminary conclusion from the analysis of the development of the brand’s Glue Value is that its strength seems dependent on the extent to which the company tries to define its users, which suggests that a more ‘white-canvas’, and/or product-oriented value proposition might lead to a stronger Glue Value. But exactly how white was the canvas of Mini compared to that of MINI? In figure 6-1 I compare the two versions of the brand in terms of the more or less generalised or otherwise localised terms in which the value propositions have been defined:

Figure 6-5: Left the Brand Values Pyramid of Mini, on the right side that of MINI. One could look at the tiers as the four dimensions of the Value Proposition: the core is univocal identifier of the product, i.e. one-dimensional. Tier two is more descriptive, still static, i.e. two dimensional. Tier three goes deeper, in the sense that it looks also at the interaction with the market, adding a third dimension: consumers. In tier four we add variation in space-time, i.e. the fourth dimension.

How do these differ?

- Mini’s original value proposition (tier 1) is defined in functional terms, i.e. it refers to objective benefits of the product; that of MINI is defined in more subjective terms, and as a result selects a specific group of users from the outset. Indeed BMW intended to create a new driving culture that would appeal to the MINI mindset, not just a practical car.
As a consequence the core values are defined in more general terms for Mini, or better, these have been more implicitly defined in the advertising and embodied by the celebrities of the 60s in London, which was the hive of the emergent popular culture at the time. The Brand values of MINI have been clearly stated by BMW executives at the time of the introduction. They are a result of the handling and functional properties of the car, but more defined in emotional terms.

As we go down the pyramid I found that Mini has a more varied set of values or associations than MINI. The Mini values as mentioned in tier 3 have emerged over time, for various reasons, and could be considered as a result of a co-evolutionary process between producers and users. MINI values have consistently informed marketing activities, all the way to defining the customisation possibilities of the car: one could customise the car, as long as this is consistent with the ‘company policy’.

For filling in the lower tier I have looked at local marketing activities. It seems that the Mini has been more subject to localised associations. I.e. it has been more akin to a fashion object. Even if BMW’s marketing strategy is consisting largely of what we called ‘place-based’ marketing, i.e. enforcing the brand’s values by acting upon local issues and traits (e.g. see picture 6-14) the value associations are much less the result of localised trends and fashions. In other words, whereas Mini looks for occasions to mingle, MINI looks for occasions to stand out, surprise.

Picture 6-37: The Berlin MINI, and a ‘place-based’ marketing action in Amsterdam.

Now I hopefully have clarified how the Mini and MINI value propositions developed and differed, I will turn to the question of the role producers and consumers have had in the process of valuation of the proposition. For both the Mini and the MINI I looked at the intended and effective 1) activation of advertising messages 2) attribution of values and benefit and 3) peer activity. In this analysis the focus is also on the differences between the two versions of the car, this means evaluating the marketing activities of the Mini, and of the re-introduction by BMW in 2001, as discussed in sections 6-4 and 6-5 above.
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Table 6-11: Rating of company and consumer input in Mini’s and MINI’s marketing activity.

Activation: CompInp I-III, ConsImp IV-II

Here our ‘blank-canvas’ hypothesis seems to be confirmed. Consumer input is higher than company input for Mini. The MINI seems to be more involved in looking for or enticing consumer activity. It is also true that when BMW introduced the MINI in 2001, the use of digital media was starting to gain momentum. Companies wanting to position the brand as experimental, young, and ‘fresh’ would of course explore the internet and the possibilities of interactivity exactly to create and support such an image. Getting personal was and is an important aim of BMW, and digitalisation (e.g. interactive billboards) allows that. However, I found consumers of the new BMW responding in kind and being quite ‘reactive’. A look at the UK webpage of the BMW initiated sports event ‘MINI Challenge’ (car sports lovers were one ‘target’ group for BMW) shows some 167 members from 2006. In the MINI’s home country, and a country quite passionate about car sports, this is probably less than what BMW wanted. Most consumer activity around the MINI is indeed limited to extended online discussions. We have also seen how MINI consumers limit their customisation activity to the possibilities offered by BMW. That was not the case for Mini; the HyPo I rating accrued by BMC’s marketing of Mini is of course also due to the more limited availability of interactive means at the time. Surprisingly though the car did act as a ‘strange attractor’.

Adding values: CompInp III-III, ConsImp V-II

The more I looked at advertisements for the old Mini, from the end of the 50s until the 70s, the more I was surprised by how the car was clearly positioned to be contemporary, modern, adhering to the current spirit of the times. This is in contrast with the accounts of the
intentions of BMC executives who merely proposed a cheap and easy solution to the problem of mobility in a large city. As a matter of fact the car’s head engineer Issigonis was not happy with the proposal of his friend John Cooper to modify the car for the Monte Carlo rally, as the car had to be an every-day car for everyone. However, the car was given to celebrities that represented the youth culture of the day. Advertising was very consistent as well in the systematic portrayal of, e.g. blonde women in short skirts, British ness (men in suits, rain, raincoats and umbrellas) and even in the choice of the colour and environment of the car. That is exactly what characterises the marketing of BMW as well: the search for distinctive aesthetic elements but also for consistency throughout external communications. It is the very need for consistency, however, that limited the amount and kind of consumer value-attribution to the brand. We have seen how BMW actually succeeded in ‘upgrading’ the brand to develop a MINI-Mindset, but in doing so created a more steered, less spontaneous image. So, maybe for Mini too, the canvas was not so blank after all, but more room is left for consumers to ‘fill-in-the-blanks’.

**Peer activity: CompInp III-IV, ConsInp V-II**

As I described in the first part of this section, the Glue Value of Mini developed over time, and the various responsible marketers of BMC, British Leyland and Rover have recognised the associations consumers had with the brand and leveraged on these, in what we could refer to as a co-evolutionary fashion. So, as time passed by different user-groups, or mindsets, have emerged, and finally Rover has tried to exploit these to make some profit on the brand, without much success. However, the image of the car was also the result of peer activity, and this activity has been largely *spontaneous*, hence I put *ConsInp* for the Mini in category V. BMW starts from the definition of the MINI mindset and is mostly interested at keeping this image consistent in time and space. This is reflected in the sparse peer activity around the brand. It is true that there are many gatherings around various MINI clubs, however, an internet search for MINI Cooper Club, shows that there are just a few large active ones. Part of BMW’s marketing is aimed at creating events around the MINI, mostly sportive ones (the MINI Challenge) but as I have mentioned before these are, at least considering internet-based information, not that successful, as most peer activity of consumers consists of the exchange of useful, practical information or of some comments on the guerrilla or place-based marketing actions.
I started off this rather long section with the question what the differences are between the Glue Value of Mini and that of MINI, and in the second place I explored the relation between the different roles of consumers and producers in the marketing, or valuation, process. Concerning the Value Proposition we have seen that Mini grew up through the years with some help from marketing, but mostly by being at the right time in the right place. Then at the age of about 18 it started experimenting with fashion, with different identities to finally define its personality at the age of 40. Afterwards it seems that the brand became increasingly narrow minded, and tried hard to stick to its believes (the movie introducing the new coupé model is a too plain reference to the Italian Job\textsuperscript{173}). Notwithstanding the fact that growing up in such a way might sound quite natural (for humans), marketing did play an important role in the process. Apparently the less the values are defined by the company, the higher the probability of a consumer’s ‘hijack’ and hence of a higher Glue Value. However this relation may be mitigated by the aesthetic characteristics of the product: Mini’s ‘puppy-look’ certainly did contribute to its adoption.

\textbf{6-9 Conclusion}

If the Mini was more akin to a rough canvas to be painted in by users, the MINI consists more of a set of predefined sketches that consumers might like or not. As a result the image of the old Mini is much more ‘friendly’ and amenable to interpretation than that of MINI. What does this mean in terms of the relationship between the marketing approaches and the Glue Value? One obvious conclusion is, that the activity of defining consumer target groups and benefits, as well as the brand’s symbolic values in emotional terms, does not necessarily lead to creating stronger value connections. However, to put it more precisely, it is the nature of the value connection that differs. Users of the MINI do have a strong value connection with the brand, but because it helps them to differentiate themselves from the crowd, I would say in a hierarchical sense. The image of the Mini, however, even as a beacon of an innovative cultural movement, is more ‘friendly’, more egalitarian, and acts more upon a need to belong than to differ. This leads to the following first consideration with respect to the Glue Value: The fact that users of the brand feel as one ‘gang’ or belonging to a neo-tribe does not necessarily imply fervent peer activity. In other words \textit{the community of Mini, but mostly of MINI owners is more akin to an ‘imagined community’ than a real one}. The identification mechanism probably consists of the fact that a strong likelihood for the product as a symbol

\textsuperscript{173} See http://www.campaignlive.co.uk/thework/1088590/Mini-another-day-adventure-WCRS-Co/ October 2011
of individualism is partly transferred to the owners of the same product. Just like we have
seen in the Diesel case, paradoxically some consumers are proud to buy-into the promise that
the acquisition of a particular product/brand shows they do not buy-into any story.

Secondly the Glue Value is largely a result of the aesthetics of the car itself and its
surrounding:

- The strong aesthetic appeal of the car is in the first instance due to the human
  connotations of it. That does not suffice, however, to justify a willingness to modify the
  product, since according to a recent extended research on the subject all cars have this feature,
  more or less\textsuperscript{174}. What is distinguishing the Mini from most other cars is its ‘puppy’ look,
  characterised not only by the handling properties and the face resembling front, but also by
  the size and round shapes of it.

- For both Mini (mostly in the 60s-70s) and MINI the design, the aesthetics in the
  advertisements of the car are very consistent and at the same time original and therefore
  identifiable.

This necessity for consistency and recognition, however, should also count for the car itself.
The startled look is indeed consistent with the swift, agile behaviour, and Mini did not really
change its look through the years. As a matter of fact BMC has attempted to introduce
variations on the basic model of the Mini\textsuperscript{175} mostly without large commercial success. BMW
is doing the same, even re-proposing failed models of BMC (see picture 6-17), so far more
successfully than BMC. Is that so, because we now live in a time that marketing is more
effective in giving meaning to a brand than the product? And in this way allowing for
detaching the product from the brand, as it were? That may be so, in fact BMW has
succeeded in giving the car an ‘authentic’ personality through marketing. Mini acquired
human connotations and was a very strong brand in the 70s already: maybe in ‘modern times’
people where more prone to make individual choices than in post-modern times (times of the
Individual…). If in the 60s people where looking for a new style, defining a specific and quite
distinguishable movement that would supplant previous ones, in the new millennium that is
less the case. In postmodern times consumers are not so much interested in organising the

\textsuperscript{174} For the extended report see The Perception of Automotive Designs. Sonja Windhager, Dennis E. Slice, Katrin Schaefer,
9047-z. ISSN 1045-6767 (Print); ISSN 1936-4776 (Online).

crowd into a ‘movement’ or a ‘revolution’, but are rather more busy ‘standing out from the crowd’ (as Diesel understood timely, cfr previous chapter). So the very zeitgeist could also explain why the first Mini was modified more often and more spontaneously than the second one. This should however be mitigated by the fact that Mini did ‘do something’ to position the car, giving it to celebrities and engaging in innovative advertising: the canvas must contain a hint as to what pictures might look like for people to start drawing their pictures.

I have described how the car has grown up through the years, however, in retrospective I am more prone to declare that Mini has died. After all, the ‘bubble car’ producer managed to conquer the UK but one look at the expression of the two Mini’s faces (picture 6-16), shows that, despite the efforts of BMW, the new one is definitely a different person, probably because BMW does not keep in mind the car’s persona so much, but rather the personas who should be driving the car now. And that is because marketing has also grown up.

![Picture 6-38: A different persona?](image)
Picture 6-39: The new (in 2011, above) and old Mini coupe\textsuperscript{176}

\textsuperscript{176}http://www.newminiclub.nl/nieuws.php?id=459 Okt 2011