Modern marketing in disguise: creating value connections between companies and consumers
Mossinkoff, M.R.H.

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Chapter 7  Marketing’s top is on the edge

7-1  Introduction

The rationale of this study was based on an alleged marketing crisis that regards marketing as a practice as well as an academic discipline. According to Leeflang (2005a) marketing is underestimated, both as a function within organizations and as a science within business schools. Concerning this last point Hackley (2001) critically notices the abundance of rhetoric constructions in normative or prescriptive marketing management texts that unproblematically suggest possibilities of control and prediction of consumer’s behaviour. Leeflang (2005a) still has faith in this possibility and suggests that, as a solution to the marketing crisis, marketers should learn their statistics better, and advocates more statistic modeling in marketing courses (Leeflang and Hunneman 2010).

Despite the lack of credibility of marketing as a discipline (which, as we have seen in chapter 1, should be understood in a broader context of critiques to neo-liberal, ‘capitalistic’ policies) the popularity of marketing amongst practitioners has increased (York, P. 2010). Interestingly, in the Netherlands the amount of marketing related jobs has been growing in the period 2004-2006, while at the same time the amount of academic jobs related to marketing has been decreasing (Mossinkoff and Jacobs 2009). It is also true that in recent decades several companies have been growing fast, especially in sectors that are characterised by a high reliance on emotional, rather than functional, product attributes. In the last decades many companies were able to establish a strong and steady relationship, a value connection, with at least a significant number of consumers. Typically these brands can be described as friendly, as they are often associated with anti-authoritarianism. Some practitioners have noticed this tendency and concluded that traditional marketing approaches may be outdated (Blümelhuber 2007) or else, that half of the money spent in marketing should be spent in product innovation (Godin 2003), but, contrary to Leeflang, they also claim that using more refined analytical techniques to deal with consumer unpredictability does not make much sense because “consumers do not do what they say or say what they do” (Wouters 2005). Postmodern marketing scholars have also proposed alternative solutions to the marketing crisis. To understand consumers these scholars have a more interpretive rather than an analytical approach that has paved the way methodologically for a renewed interest in qualitative and descriptive approaches of research in marketing and of market research (a.o. Stephen Brown
1994, Firat et al. 1994, Kozinets 2002). Of course ‘good’ statisticians should be aware of and deal with the limitations of reductionist approaches, but the postmodern critique goes deeper in that it states that one should not pretend to tame unpredictable markets and consumers through the development and application of complicated statistical models, but rather describe and understand the complexity of the cultural and social dimensions of consumption. This implies dealing with unpredictability without the use of more sophisticated predictive models.

Summarising there seem to be two kinds of solutions to the alleged marketing crisis: a hypermodern one, which implies possibilities for control and manipulation (through statistical modeling), and a postmodern one which advocates more reactive, adaptive, or co-evolutionary approaches. Knowing consumers is important in both cases, but in the first one this means a view of consumers as objects of company attempts at manipulation – i.e. a ‘means-end’ approach – whereas in the second case consumers are considered subjects who are not always rational and consistent and therefore inherently unpredictable.

However, a ‘friendly’ kind of value connection is not necessarily the result of postmodern marketing approaches. Manipulation and control of groups of people has always been an inherent feature of societies, and it might be a bit too pretentious to think that postmodernism involves a radical break with history. After all, modern times also find their origin in the belief in the possibilities for ‘enlightenment’ of knowledgeable – albeit rational – citizens, who would finally be able to make their own, individual choices (and thus, at that time, ought to be freed from the Bastille).

So is a ‘brand-as-a-friend’ value connection also the result of ‘friendly’, or postmodern, marketing? Or more generally (see also chapter 1):

*How does marketing contribute to the establishment of a strong value connection between companies and consumers?*

To answer this question I have formulated the following questions:

*iii. What are the characteristics of a strong value connection between a brand and consumers?*

*iv. And how does marketing contribute to creating them?*

In order to answer these questions I have further explored the constituencies of hyper- and postmodern approaches to marketing and the nature of a value connection in chapter 2, by
developing the HyPo dimension and glue value classifier respectively. Then in chapter 3 I have presented an excursus on methodological issues to explore the scientific side of the marketing crisis and to justify my empirical approach. In the subsequent chapters 4, 5, and 6 I have used this framework to understand the relationship between the glue value of the brands Diesel, Innocent Drinks, Mini and MINI, and the marketing activities initiated by their parent companies and consumers as well.

In this final Chapter I will follow the same logical structure of the case studies. This structure implies 1) looking at the broader picture in terms of the societal and business contexts of the brands’ expansion, 2) focusing on the glue value(s) of these brands, 3) analysing the marketing activity surrounding them and finally 4) commenting on the relationship between the two. In section 7-2 I will deal with the social and cultural context of the brand’s expansion and in section 7-3 I am going to compare the brands using the glue value qualifier. In section 7-4 I will turn to evaluating marketing activities in terms of the HyPo dimension and confront the results with those from the previous sections to conclude that postmodern marketing approaches are not a necessary condition for a postmodern, friendly value connection between companies and consumers. In section 7-5 I will return to the main question and describe how hypermodern marketing can be disguised in a postmodern jacket. In section 7-6 I will discuss marketing as an activity of continuously triggering consumers by anticipating on trends and feeding them marginal innovations. In section 7-7 I will come back to this issue to show how fashion as an economic – complex – system explains the nature of interactions between companies and consumers.

7-2 The soul of time

In order to understand why the brands under consideration have gained broad recognition and a strong value connection with consumers relatively rapidly, we first have to understand the societal and business contexts in which they thrived. The meaning of all four brands is, to a large extent, related to the current zeitgeist; albeit in different degrees, their value propositions were presented in the right place at the right moment.

In section 3-5, when presenting the criteria on the basis of which I chose these brands, I referred to the concept of ‘societal innovation’ introduced by Cova and Svanvelt (1993). These authors contend that societal innovations are the result of an innovation strategy that implies adding cultural meaning to products: adding slight variations on existing themes that continuously renew the relationship consumers have with products. In other words, only in the
context of the extant zeitgeist do products acquire a specific symbolic meaning. More precisely, societal innovations have the following characteristics:

1. A focus on the social context rather than on market segments.
2. A new relation between products and users.
3. Serving as social links holding together postmodern tribes.

So after having analysed these brands more in-depth, can we say that these were indeed societal innovations as intended by Cova and Svanvelt? Next I will discuss points 1 and 2 above. Point three deserves a more extended treatment and will be discussed in section 7-5 (cfr between neo-tribes and imagined communities).

Point 1 above seems to be true, as all four brands ‘say something’ about their times:

✔ Diesel: Jeans are a vehicle for a positive message from the youth (80s).
✔ Innocent: Indulgence can be combined with health (90s).
✔ Mini: Less is more, make love not war (60s).
✔ MINI: There is a new ‘creative/urban class’ (2000-).

Point 2 applies to the first three cases, maybe less for MINI:

✔ Diesel: Wearing denim as an act of communication.
✔ Innocent: Eating fresh fruit, but in a ‘quick & dirty’ way.
✔ Mini: A car can be small, functional, mostly fun.
✔ MINI: Same as Mini, at least in the USA.

So, we can conclude that the first two conditions are satisfied for the most part, as the MINI was probably new to the USA market but not to the world. At the time of its introduction in the USA the marketing managers of MINI declared: “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 […] in fact MINI will open up a new segment in the US as no other manufacturer will offer cars that look or drive like the MINI COOPER and MINI COOPER ‘S’.” (italics added).\(^\text{177}\)

Whether or not it was a new segment, sector or brand, the difference with the other cases is that it was not a new interpretation of the extant zeitgeist.

\(^\text{177}\) http://new.minimania.com/web/SCatagory/Factory/DisplayType/News/DisplayID/1055/ArticleV.cfm

March 2009.
Being the first to ‘hook-up’ with the zeitgeist in terms of introducing a relevant value proposition is, however, not a sufficient condition for success. In fact, Innocent, Diesel and Mini thrived on fertile grounds.

According to one of the founders of Innocent the idea to produce smoothies was not that original. In fact, in 1999 the market for crushed fresh fruit drinks was already booming in the USA, particularly in California where it was worth an estimated 250 mln dollars. The owners admit checking the internet a lot to get inspired and looking at the USA for the conception of the product. The Smoothie was a healthy substitute for coffee to go; some users refer to it as the ‘new caffelatte’, a ‘cool’ drink to enjoy ‘to go’, on the run, on the road, for breakfast or as a snack. Others consider it the drink of the 21st century, the ‘drink du jour for the beautiful people’ which also brings a bit of sunny California to rainy UK. As we have seen extensively in chapter 5, in the UK the market was developing quickly as several small producers were also offering fresh smoothies, and big companies, like Nestlé, Pepsi and Coca-Cola were watching and waiting.

Diesel never introduced a totally new product, but adhered to the new motivational state of being independent and rebellious that came with a new clothing style, as “by the 1980s, ripped, frayed and torn jeans were a normal sight”. 179

In the 60s miniskirts were a normal sight. The Mini was developed because of the successful presence of similar concepts in continental Europe (Fiat 500, Volkswagen Beetle, Renault 4, Citroen 2CV); even the name Mini was inspired by an existing car in the UK called the Morris Minor, produced by the Morris Motor Company. It was also designed by Issigonis and existed from 1948 to 1971.

I think Cova and Svanveld’s concept of societal innovation is thus very much related to that of product category, which implies a focus on the product’s use, and not on the product’s attributes. The British Chartered Institute for Marketing defines a product category from the perception of consumers and not suppliers as the emergence of a new need. Moreover the Australian and New Zealand Marketing Association defines the category-need as being “the buyer’s perception of requiring a product to remove or satisfy a perceived discrepancy between the current motivational state and the desired motivational state”. 181

180 http://www.cim.co.uk/resources/glossary/home.aspx Oktober 2010
our cases there was a desired motivational state for products satisfying new symbolic needs. And the desired motivational state must be interpreted in terms of changing systems of value (therefore a new zeitgeist). In section 2-4, when commenting on the relevance of a value proposition, I have concluded ‘that a value proposition is a promise related to the realisation of relevant goals’, and that these goals are represented by a system of values, which is a cultural system that in the case of a ‘zeitgeist’ is defined on a broader level. What we can add now, is that for a value proposition to be relevant (i.e. contributing to creating a new product category) this cultural system of reference must be slightly anticipated, as Diesel understood well. This is also a reason why the brands got popular from the start: buzz around the brands was also due to a certain cognitive distance between the ‘latte’ and the smoothie, or between a neat pair of trousers and a ripped off one, or a ‘normal’ car and the Mini. Some slight resistance before overcoming the cognitive distance was due to the fact that the establishment of a new product category requires the creation of ‘a common representation in the form of a dominant design’ (Jacobs 2007: 75) which must not be too far from existing ones, however. An indicator for the first two conditions of Cova and Svanveld might thus be a slight misfit.

So, I think that for a large part the strength of the value connection the four brands managed to establish with a significant number of consumers, consisted of their capacity to interpret and slightly anticipate the ‘zeitgeist’ or the larger cultural value systems. However, if Diesel always refers to larger value systems, the other brands did so only in the beginning. So, in order to survive they may have found allegiance with smaller value systems or microcultures, as the third condition stated above suggests that societal innovations serve as ‘social links holding together postmodern tribes’, i.e. they must have a strong glue value.

7-3 The Glue Value of brands

When exploring the reasons why certain messages stick in our minds, Malcolm Gladwell (2000) finds strategic relevance to be one of the main explanatory factors. The glue value of a brand is however not the same as the stickiness of a message in that the brand is the glue that keeps people together. In electromagnetic terms the brand acts like a magnet. Neither is the glue value the indicator of a strong brand (Aaker 1995) and it also differs from the concept of Lovemarks (Roberts 2005) because these latter classifications imply ordinal, linear rankings of brands (‘my brand is better than yours!’).

In order to define and measure the glue value of a brand in chapter 2, I have explored the cultural and social dimensions of a value connection between consumers and brands and
developed a qualifier which gave us an indication of its strength. For the sake of clarity in the following discussion, I have summarised the glue value qualifier in table 7-1, in terms of the symbolic value (row above) and the benefits (underneath) implied in the value proposition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HyPo I</th>
<th>HyPo II</th>
<th>HyPo III</th>
<th>HyPo IV</th>
<th>HyPo V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic value is ‘value for money’.</td>
<td>Symbolic value conveys individual status/attractiveness.</td>
<td>Symbolic value is understood in a broader social context.</td>
<td>Symbolic value is recognized in a smaller, ‘tribal’ social context.</td>
<td>Symbolic value is ‘hijacked’.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The benefits of the value proposition are to solve basic, physiological problems of subsistence. The benefits of the value proposition are related to enhancing attractiveness. The benefits of the value proposition imply allegiance to trends reflecting extant zeitgeist. The benefits of the value proposition imply allegiance to a specific (local) micro-cultural context. Consumers generate benefits by adding values to the firm’s proposition.

Table 7-1: A summary of the glue value qualifier. See also table 2-1.

As one can infer from the upper row, this classification is based on the nature of the symbolic value of the brand or more precisely: what does the brand stand for and for who? I have also taken into consideration the perception of the value proposition as it developed in time and space. A more stable glue value would probably mean more control from the company, whereas more variation in the glue value ‘landscape’ could be an indicator of a more open and thus co-evolutionary approach. At the same time, though, more variation in the perception of the value proposition could be totally due to chance. As a consequence a glue value in category HyPo V is more postmodern, as consumers – or chance – are in the lead, whereas a glue value in category I is more hypermodern, in that it implies a perceived possibility of objective comparison and the choice of a best option.

So what is the Glue value of our brands? And how stable is it?

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182 The more objectively definable the benefits of a product, the more one can objectively rank these on a scale, and the other way around. This is one of the reasons why I advocate a moderate use of techniques like Conjoint Analysis to measure the perception of the value proposition; often symbolic values are there but hidden, think of retailer brands like Aldi or Mediaworld, which act upon the symbolic value of being clever.
Diezel: II Symbolic value conveys individual status/attractiveness.

In Chapter 4 I have concluded that values implied in Diesel’s image are symbolic, but mostly aspirational, helping consumers in conveying status more than belonging. When asked about a characteristic of the brand, one word consumers often mentioned is arrogance. The definition of the jeans as a vehicle for individual expression is reflected in the corporate communications that invite interlocutors to look at social issues with the aim of extracting a personal advantage before improving any societal situation. One of the expressions of personal advantage is mating; references to sexual images are always quite explicit despite a ‘double-edginess’ in the company’s communications. Talking about edges, we have also seen how one of the main distinguishing features of Diesel’s value proposition is innovation or innovativeness. The company, especially in the 80s and 90s, gave the impression of always being ‘on the edge’, among others by its approach to market research, akin to what nowaday often goes under the heading ‘coolhunting’. If one combines this with the overt refusal of marketing research as a concept, it is not surprising that the term arrogant pertains to the semantic field of the brand’s significance. This innovative attitude leaves little room for co-evolution. According to recent ideas like ‘co-creation’ or ‘crowdsourcing’ it seems that innovation should be consumer-driven to be successful, but I think that continuously asking consumers for new ideas does certainly not convey the image of a company full of new ideas. Diesel understands this well. As we saw in section 4-2, as years pass by the product got increasingly detached from the brand, showing how company executives managed to increase control over the perception of its products by tentatively taking distance from the market. From the beginning of the 90s it was the explicit aim of the founder of the company to create a worldwide brand and soon other product categories were included in the value proposition. I have shown how, as the brand grew, the product’s design became increasingly predictable. The company’s owner explicitly declared the necessity to support the products with the brand, the recent appointment of a brand manager from the food industry to manage the Diesel business unit is testimony to that.183

183 Which was previously run by the founder himself, who is now focusing on the further development of the Staff International, Only The Brave holding’s third subsidiary (next to Diesel and DSL55) meant to produce and distribute more exclusive collections of several established new luxury brands (the most recent being Just Cavalli) including their own new luxury collection: Black-Gold.
Innocent: III  

*Symbolic value is understood in a broader social context.*

In chapter 5 I have shown that the symbolic value of Innocent may be more directly related to the spirit of the times and in particular the ‘cool capitalism’ trend of the late nineties. Innocent, however, was inevitably bound to more local cultural reference systems (charity, Oxford-college, The Guardian, Penguin books...). I think this was even the reason why the company was eventually forced to seek collaboration with Coca-Cola, which has been able to push the product through the distribution channels in continental Europe, where it could not create a similar value connection to the one in the UK. That is, of course, also due to the fact that as the smoothies category grew, competition in continental Europe did as well; not only from similar companies trying to imitate the concept, but also from private labels as well as larger brands in the food industry, like Chiquita[^184^], which were able to offer a similar product for a lower price. In the UK Innocent became a beacon of a tendency to combine apparently antithetical human traits of 1) being good for the environment, but making money at the same time (societal level) and 2) being good and disciplined towards oneself but indulgent at the same time (individual level). Again, the very fact that the brand had a strong social but national relevance has, however, impeded the expansion of the company, not only geographically but also in terms of new products or product categories (in the appendix to chapter 5 I gave a list of several attempts Innocent did to discover new product-market combinations). At it’s core, the value proposition of Innocent drinks has not changed since the brand was introduced in 2001. Neither did it change much in terms of brand values or product offering. It did change in terms of presentation, albeit slightly, as a consequence, however, of targeting new consumer groups. These were children, hence child friendly packaging and some slightly smoother products, the elderly, and families outside the city, hence the liter tetrapacks and the distribution through larger retailers. The gradual expansion towards new consumer groups is sometimes depicted by the owners as totally serendipitous[^185^]. It is, however, also true that the company owners had grand plans from the beginning, a.o. to become the World’s, and later Europe’s leading sustainable fast-moving consumer goods company.

[^184^]: According to Innocent’s former marketing manager for Benelux, Chiquita formed a real threat because it had money to spend in advertisement, as well as an established distribution structure.

[^185^]: In one of the many interviews founder Richard Reed tells how he had to pick up a friend’s child from school, which led him to think of the children’s market.
A few times company executives were particularly surprised by the fact that consumers reacted to their initiatives in larger numbers than expected. One time elderly and younger people spontaneously gathered to knit the caps for the bottle during the Big Knit campaign. Another one is when company executives reacted on consumer demands for changes in the product (e.g. leaving out bananas). Company managers claim several times to be surprised by consumer activity, but I found no fundamental changes in the value proposition as a consequence of that. In the first case consumers actually reacted as it where ‘in kind’ to company initiatives, albeit vigorously and somewhat surprisingly. In the second case the company merely adjusted the product according to consumer preferences. Opening up the company for interaction with consumers is only another way to get market information without having to organise groups interviews as most companies do. So the strategy of Innocent was innovative in that is was relying on a ‘planned trial and error’ or on what Beinhocker calls deductive tinkering (2006: 249). This is, however, something different than co-evolution, as at its core the value proposition did not change.

**Mini**: IV Symbolic value is recognized in a smaller, ‘tribal’ social context.

The case of Mini is of particular interest since the car was introduced when modernism was still spelled without the prefix ‘post’. However, we have seen in chapter 6 that the marketing of Mini in the 60s may have been more postmodern than that of MINI, but also of that of the other cases. Chance played a part as, at the time, the company’s strategy was aimed at producing and selling as many cars as possible to as many different people as possible. The brand, however, soon became associated with specific, contemporary values. Its emerging anti-authoritarian image (largely due to the product’s characteristics) as well as its coincidence with the 60s movements, laid premises, gave hints of ‘postmodern times’ almost by chance. The reason why I have put this brand in category IV as opposed to III like Innocent is that Mini is a more discriminating brand. Driving a Mini calls for signs of mutual understanding, drinking an Innocent drink does not. In the next section we will look at the impact marketing had on this, but a car is not a drink, which might also explain a different symbolic value. The choice process for a car is more pondered, after all a car says more about the owner than a drink.\(^{186}\) Still the symbolic value of Mini is higher than that of MINI, and arguably of most other cars at the time. This is also because the product’s aesthetics

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\(^{186}\text{Conversely though, this might reinforce the conclusions for Innocent.}\)
apparently ask for interaction; however since its introduction in category HyPo I-II, the car very quickly ‘moved’ to HyPo category V-IV. So yes, maybe in this case we might talk about co-evolution: because of its functional characteristics and aesthetics the car was picked-up by the jet-set, and the parent company at the time, BMC, swiftly reacted e.g. by specifically addressing specific celebrities, thereby repositioning the brand. Another indication of the intended initial positioning of the car is the fact that the price was low, too low. In fact it is very probable that many owners would have been prepared to pay more than the 500 pounds, which was its original price.

**MINI**: II *Symbolic value conveys individual status/attractiveness.*

If the Mini was positioned as a functional car that became ‘cool’ almost by chance, the MINI had been positioned from its inception as a cool, very cool car. With BMW the Mini grew up to become MINI. What does this mean? For one thing, growing up means that the brain becomes less susceptible to change. This is evident from the fact that BMW clearly exposed, interpreted and communicated the MINI brand’s values (both to the market and internally in the organization). In this case it is therefore interesting to note how BMW tried hard to convey the same image as the original Mini, i.e. that of a playful, somehow startled, witty but still innocent kid. At the same time it managed to create an image of an exclusive car, sold mainly in big cities where the ‘creative-class’ lives. We have seen in section 6-7 how MINI-BMW executives had clear ideas about the kinds of people who should drive the car. They often refer to a MINI mindset, and thereby to the younger, urban-based, well-off kind of person. By doing so the brand became more exclusive,¹⁸⁷ which seems to work economically, as it allows BMW to ask for higher prices.

*A brand as a friend?*

Looking at the glue value of the value connection between the four companies and their customers we have seen that Innocent and Mini have a more ‘friendly’ image. In terms of the glue value qualifier the benefits associated with these brands respectively imply allegiance to

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¹⁸⁷ On the opposite one could say that the strategy of mini (MINI?) was ‘inclusive’, i.e. it did not exclude users for not having the mini-mindset.
trends reflecting extant zeitgeist and allegiance to a specific (local) micro-cultural context. The glue value of MINI is more akin to that of Diesel, suggesting exclusiveness and individualism or better, brands for a crowd that increasingly wants to stand out of the crowd. According to the glue value qualifier their benefits are related to enhancing attractiveness. MINI and Diesel are still friends, but different ones.

Concerning the third condition for an innovation to be societal, i.e. brands act as ‘social links holding together postmodern tribes’ we have mixed results (i.e. lower glue values than expected). So, either 1) the third condition does not hold or 2) the concept of postmodern tribe needs refinement. To unravel that we have to look at the part postmodern tribes or microcultural systems have played in adding values to the companies’ propositions.

Confronting the marketing approaches of the parent companies will help us understand the extent to which the glue value has been the result of company and consumer contributions in the valuation process. Probably both played a part, but who led the valuation dance?

In other words, now it is time to turn our attention to the right and left sides of our synthetic research framework reproduced in figure 7-1.

![Figure 7-6: The research framework in synthesis. See also section 3-4.](image-url)
7-4 The relation between HyPo marketing and Glue Value

In the first two sections of chapter 2 I have shown how the alleged marketing crisis calls for both hyper- and postmodern solutions. After that I ranked a number of solutions along a HyPo dimension as shown in figure 7-2.

Figure 7-7: Hyper- and postmodern solutions to the marketing crisis. See also section 2-2

Hypermodern approaches generally imply attempts to control by manipulation of behaviour and perceptions, whereas postmodern approaches imply more trial-and-error like strategies, which can lead to forms of co-evolution between companies and consumers. In its most extreme Pomo manifestations the glue value of a brand is high, and its image mostly the outcome of initiatives from the demand side, i.e. the right side of the dimension in figure 7-2.

To differentiate between hyper- and postmodern approaches I have identified three kinds of marketing valuation activities based on: adding values (AV), activating the message (AC), and sharing or peer activity (PA). For each of these activities I have looked at the parts of both companies and consumers. It is important to note here that the valuation process is not a zero-sum game, i.e. the input from both sides can be low or high at the same time. In table 7-2 I reproduce this framework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glue value</th>
<th>Adding Values</th>
<th>Activation</th>
<th>Peer Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>AVs</td>
<td>ACs</td>
<td>PAs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image</td>
<td>AVd</td>
<td>AVd</td>
<td>PAd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7-2: An integrated framework of analysis. See also section 3-4.
In table 7-2 one can see that I have inferred the glue value from both the supply (identity) and the demand (image) sides of the perception of the value proposition. Also, the three indicators of marketing are evidenced as inputs from the supply ($s$, or intended effects) and demand ($d$) sides.

An example of the expected relationship between the left and right sides of table 7-1 can be described as follows. We have just seen that MINI and Diesel are similar in that they were both positioned in glue value HyPo category II. It makes intuitive sense that in some respects the images of these two brands are more similar to each other than those of Mini and Innocent that I have found pertaining to respectively HyPo IV and III. This would imply that the marketing of these brands should be more on right side of our HyPo-marketing dimension as well, because postmodern marketing approaches postulate that consumers give meaning to brands as well, not just companies, and friendship implies reciprocation.

In table 7-3 I have reproduced the results from chapters 5, 6 and 7. From the company’s perspective ($ComInp$) a higher valuation means a company has been ‘trying hard’ to engage consumers. Consumers must give meaning to the brand ($AV$), share the message ($AC$), and engage in communal activities related to the brand ($PA$). On the other ($ConsInp$) side consumers might indeed respond to the company’s intentions in kind, or else engage with the company spontaneously, for instance by adding original values and meaning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Activation (AC)</th>
<th>Adding Values (AV)</th>
<th>Peer Activity (PA)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$ComInp$ (ACs)</td>
<td>$ConsInp$ (ACd)</td>
<td>$ComInp$ (AVs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diesel</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innocent</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mini (BMC)</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MINI (BMW)</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7-3: An overview of company and consumer input in the marketing valuation process

Before commenting on the degrees of company and consumer inputs in the valuation process, I will first turn to the research framework again that I presented in chapter 3 where I have also introduced the value connection pyramid. In figure 7-3 the pyramid is reproduced in terms of connection levels between the company and consumers. The terms in the pyramid layers refer to the objects managers would define. Hypermodern approaches imply that managers have
quite clearly defined ideas about them from the outset, and that upper tiers univocally inform
the lower ones. Postmodern approaches imply that consumers fill in the tiers, or else, that the
company leaves more room for consumers to do so as lower tiers inform the upper ones.

**Figure 7-8: The value-connection pyramid. See also section 3-4.**

I have reproduced the pyramids of the four cases in figure 7-4 below for comparison. This
time the terms in the pyramid layers show what activities managers have filled in when they
defined the terms of the value connection.

**Diesel spa**

**Innocent ltd**
So let’s see how these results relate to those generated by the glue value qualifier discussed in the previous section. I have said, for instance, that we would expect Diesel and MINI to show similar patterns, which would be consistent with the nature of their glue values. To have a clearer view of these patterns, I have reproduced the valuations of company (PAs, ACs, AVs) and consumer (AVd, ACd, PAd) inputs in the marketing activities in figure 7-5, where the roman numerals on the horizontal axis represent the HyPo dimension as from figure 7-2.
One initial observation from this figure is, that MINI has been trying harder to engage with consumers in terms of activities (MINI tries harder to exploit the interactive features of digital media) and values. MINI tried harder to elicit consumer reactions, whereas the double-edginess present in Diesel’s definition of values led to a more subtle way of eliciting consumer reactions. It becomes evident from the figure that the fact that Diesel uses less explicit means of communication, generates higher levels of consumer activity than MINI. In fact MINI is also more explicit in formulating who should drive the car and why.

Both companies aimed at creating imagined communities by generating online and offline environments where consumers could share and interact. Did consumers respond in-kind (ConImp)? Yes, they did. Consumers do interact, do positively respond to proposed activities (e.g. Joanna, Diesel’s fake Polish celebrity actually had a fan-base, and MINI customers engage with the car itself) but at the same time they do not engage in peer activities as much as I expected. I did not find any spontaneous, original consumer activity concerning the brands MINI and Diesel. This, however, does not mean that there is no communal, or community feeling. The Value Proposition of these brands is quite consistent through time.

Figure 7-5: Company and consumer contributions to the valuation process
and in category II, as both brands were positioned as ‘premium’ from their inception. Or rather, the brand managers had clear ideas about what the meaning of the brands should be, and hence of the type of value connection consumers should have had with them. To conclude from this: a communal, ‘tribal’ feeling amongst consumers does not necessarily imply a lot of peer activity. So the question is: were these companies really stimulating peer activity or only creating the impression of a lot of peer activity around the brand? However explicit the marketing executives’ intentions have been in this respect, it seems to me that the companies’ marketing has generated a perception of fervent peer activity around the brand, more than real activity.

The glue value of Innocent and Mini is in the categories III and IV respectively. I think this confirms the impression of a somewhat more ‘friendly’ image of these brands. Is the marketing of these companies also significantly different from that of Diesel and MINI? The row for ComplInp of Innocent actually looks nearly the same as that of Diesel. This might be surprising at first glance, after all, Diesel does have a more arrogant image. Apparently a more hypermodern approach to marketing does not necessarily lead to a lower glue value. Although from the very beginning Innocent had international ambitions and aims just like Diesel, it did not manage to establish the same kind of value connection with consumers in continental Europe as it got in the UK. At the same time, the rapid expansion of Innocent in the UK shows that the values implied by the brand were more entangled with local cultural reference systems. So here we clearly see a distinction between the nature of the value proposition and the kind of marketing approach employed by the company: more hypermodern marketing is not necessarily related to a lower smile effect or a less ‘friendly’ image. Do the companies differ in terms of ConsInp? AC is the same for both companies, indicating that consumers have responded ‘in kind’ in both cases. Innocent consumers have contributed more to adding values to the value proposition however, which is again due to the fact that Innocent has thrived on values reflecting a more specific cultural and historical context. So, maybe the very reason why Innocent grew so fast, impeded its further expansion at the same time (cfr previous section). ‘Real’ fan groups existed, even if probably not so numerous (according to Coca-Cola’s reports), and never ‘reinventing’ the brand or spontaneously organising – exchange – activities in the name of Innocent.

Mini (BMC) was also very British, but went international and became already one of the world’s most iconic brands a few years after its introduction. How come? We have already seen how the Britishness of Mini was an international kind of Britishness. The Union Jack in
the 60s stood for the emergence of a new worldwide sentiment embodied by for example the Beatles or by the Paul Smith fashion brand (cfr section 4-5).

If we look at CompInp for Mini we see that this has not been that high compared to the other brands. The positioning of the car was very much functional, as the car was created with the idea that people needed a small, efficient vehicle, but the brand acquired strong symbolic values soon. According to an interview with the marketing manager responsible for the introduction, celebrities were endorsed intentionally. The advertisements also show quite some allegiance with the extant zeitgeist, hence the valuation III for values added by the company. The highest ranking we have found so far is that of V for ConsInp regarding values added and peer activity. This is interesting in combination with a valuation of I for intended consumer activation (CompInp). Looking at the ‘value connection pyramid’ tier 1 of Mini shifted from cat I to cat III because the lower tier was filled in by consumers.

The conclusion regarding the different approaches and resulting effects of MINI and Diesel above is reinforced by the difference between the graphs of Mini and MINI in figure 7-5. Mini tried even ‘less hard’ than Diesel, but people were interacting even more with the brand. If we look at this and take the conclusion into consideration again that the marketing of Diesel and MINI has generated a perception of fervent communal activities around the brand, it consequently seems that marketing in ‘traditional modern times’ may have been more postmodern than in postmodern times.

Also, if we look at the fact that the brands have quite consistent images that are more often than not the result of the company’s intentions, we could conclude that trying hard to engage with consumers and to involve them in marketing activities is actually a means of manipulating consumer perceptions and behaviour, which is tantamount to using what Jacobs (2010) calls ‘half empty concepts’, i.e. to give room to consumers’ interpretation but not too much. When a company tries harder to activate consumers, define the values of the brand, and to stimulate peer activity, the probability that consumers actually pick up the brand and make it a symbol of group identification might decline. This is however not a plea to do nothing, as some input is necessary: a half empty concept is also half full.

Before commenting further on the marketing approaches and linking these to the glue values, as well as to the social context as described in section 7-2, we should face some manipulative elements inherent to the way the companies approached consumers, that marketing managers were not, or maybe not completely, aware of. For this reason some manipulative mechanisms
may seem quite innocent, but they still are forms of modern instead of postmodern marketing. In other words: these are forms of modern marketing in disguise.

7-5 Modern marketing in disguise

If marketing, as Leeflang (2005a) contends, is to be a strategic activity, then one must consider that the term strategy has many interpretations, but always has two sides (Jacobs 2010): one intended, the other emergent, i.e. what ‘happens’. Looking at Complnp, or the supply-side in table 7-3, meant focusing on the first side, the intended one. Opposing that with the demand side, Conslnp, also helped us to find out which were the characteristics of the marketing approaches that managers, as well as consumers, might have been less aware of. Thus far I have identified the following mechanisms:

1. **Getting personal**: Marketing can give a brand a defined personality by making use of the interactive nature of media (as interfaces) or of intertextuality, next to using anthropomorphic designs. In this way consumers develop a value connection of a personal, human kind with the brand.

2. **Between neo-tribes and imagined communities**: The value connection is often the result of a need for group-identification. Marketing creates more or less imagined and more or less exclusive communities to which consumers may possibly be attracted.

3. **Interaction, reciprocation and co-evolution**: Humans tend to reciprocate or respond in kind, also when there is no direct, evident payoff in doing so. When marketing asks consumers to reciprocate, consumers often do. Leveraging on this tendency can lead to creating a strong value connection.

4. **Play & games**: In nature play and playfulness are important means to discover and learn, to adapt and co-evolve. After a short break due to modernistic distinctions between ‘serious’ and trivial issues, now sometimes being playful is allowed again. At the same time postmodern marketing has rediscovered the coercive nature of playfulness and games.

Now let’s have a deeper look at how these mechanisms manifested themselves and try to better understand how they work.
Getting personal

If a brand were a person, Diesel and MINI would probably be more arrogant types, and Innocent and Mini more playful and witty. The idea of assigning personalities to brands in order for consumers to develop a personal relation with them is not new (Aaker 1995). Some even question the usefulness of such a metaphor in the context of postmodern malleable identities (as brands need a more solid DNA than people, see also Faurholt Csaba and Bengtsson 2006). Still an interesting marketing question is: how can one make brands ‘alive’? I found that especially for Innocent and Mini anthropomorphism for a large part explains the emergence of a real, personal value connection between these brands and some of their consumers. BMW ‘tried hard’ to infuse life into the MINI – to become ‘cool’ – but indeed that might have backfired in terms of image as attempts can be perceived as pedantic (cfr section 4-7).

According to Zaltman and Zaltman (2008:37), anthropomorphism appeals to basic metaphors or archetypes that reflect values that are universally shared. At the same time they comment that “marketers must elicit them naturally […] that is, the archetypes must emerge automatically and spontaneously”. This means that marketers must act upon the very idiosyncratic cultural context of consumers to elicit these natural metaphors. This again shows the importance of intertextuality (the use of ‘half-empty concepts’) in the brand’s semiotics. Stephen Brown in his introduction to postmodern marketing (1994: 168-69) states that everything in postmodernism is intertextual. Referring to the work of Roland Barthes he shows how in postmodern terms “only readers can bring temporary meaning to a text as unity lies not in its origin but in its destination” (Brown, 1994: 84, italics added). For that meaning to be more stable though, a company must define the terms to a larger extent than consumers do.

One of the ways humans make sense of their environment is to use anthropomorphic projections. Sometimes they tend to attribute human aesthetic, emotional and behavioural traits to non-human agents (cars but also pets, cfr box 6-1), in order to ‘make sense’ and predict or control their behaviour. Different people, however, react differently to

188 At the time of writing a call for papers has been issued by the Journal of Marketing management advocating more research on the ‘poorly understood’ role of anthropomorphism in marketing. See http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/cfp/rjmmcfp.pdf January 2012.

189 Maybe it helps to compare marketing to European directives in this respect.

anthropomorphic cues. In fact we have seen that for some the Mini is like a family member, a close friend, a child, or else that the Innocent bottle has a specific face in the eyes of the British, but that is of course not so for everyone. Waytz et al. (2010) give an overview of confirmatory empirical research on the antecedents of the degree to which people tend to anthropomorphise, finding that “at least three major constructs appear to account for variability in anthropomorphism: knowledge elicited by the agent being perceived, the perceiver’s motivation for social connection, and the perceiver’s motivation to be an effective and competent social agent” (2010:411).

The two dimensions of the glue value are reflected in this: 1) cultural context: the knowledge elicited by the agent being perceived is tantamount to considering the cultural reference system necessary to interpret the signs, and 2) social triggering: variety in the need for social connection and compliance explains why some consumers are more apt to become ‘fans’ than others. Other factors might explain why there is variance in the kinds of value connection consumers develop with brand personas. Anthropomorphising a product can also lead to repulsion (after all some people make us smile and willing to engage, just like other people make us turn away).

The third construct in the quote of Waytz et al. above tells us that people tend to assign anthropomorphic traits to products the higher ‘the perceiver’s motivation to be an effective and competent social agent’. The same author further quotes Heider (1964) to show how the criteria to do so are also the result of basic ‘schemata’ according to which we infer meaning from aesthetic cues. Commenting on the constituent parts of schemata Heider notes that “motives and sentiments are psychological entities. . . . they are ‘mentalistic concepts’ so-called intervening variables that bring order into the array of behavior mediating them” (Ibid. 412). In this manner schemata are intervening variables mediating human behavior or else informing preferences. In this respect it is interesting to note that Mini and Innocent are not only human, they are also quite young. I have shown in chapters 6 and 5 how MINI is akin to a grown up version of Mini, and that several journalists and marketing writers alike write of the Innocent smoothie by using appellations one would use when referring to a child. In the context of Mini and Innocent one of these ‘schemata’ might be what Lorenz (1950) refers to as ‘kinderschema’ or infant-schema (in Hrdy 2009: 221). This schema implies: “relatively large head, large, low-lying eyes, and pudgy cheeks. Together with short thick extremities and clumsy, gamboling movements…”. That is so because infants need attention to survive. If one combines these findings with the fact that Mini and Innocent attracted mostly women, even if
this was not intended from the outset, then I think one possible conclusion is that there must be some evolutionary, ancestral mechanisms at work here.

**Between neo-tribes and imagined communities**

We have seen that Diesel and MINI, but in a more subtle way Innocent too, thrived on an alleged capacity people would have to express their *unique* identities through consumption, or even more pretentiously to be free to build a unique identity through consumption (i.e. the world as a ‘supermarket of identities’, as Zygmunt Bauman called it).

In section 2-6 I have shown how sociologists like Maffesoli, Bauman and Duivendak criticise the individualistic discourse and the illusion of individual choice (as a choice of *identity*) to show an inherent paradox: if a person chooses *not* to be an individual decision maker, is he or she not more so than someone who claims to be one? This tension between individual distinction and group belonging is not postmodern though; in his notorious account on fashion Simmel (1904) identified an inevitable, primordial (and somehow tragic) human tension between exclusion and belonging, a distinction on which the glue value qualifier is based as well. From the 80s on individual ambitions to ‘stand out from the crowd’ seem to be a new ideology (remember that the MINI was intended for those who ‘stand out from the crowd’, for Mini the opposite is true), but of course, if everyone stands out from the crowd there would be no crowd left, so happiness is not for everyone but, in Diesel’s terms, for *only the brave*.191

The point is that individualism, like many other -isms, is a discourse that keeps people together (ideologies have a strong glue value!). As Zizeck (2009) suggests when commenting on the widespread environmentalistic trend, a society always needs a ‘common project’ or indeed systems of belief, or ideals. These common projects can be more or less localised, as well as more or less institutionalised. With respect to localisation we have seen how Innocent among others has thrived upon a very British version of a more general 90s trend of health (or *healthism*192…). Diesel on the other hand has relied on broader cultural reference systems and formulates its messages in terms that go beyond e.g. national cultural boundaries (e.g. a positive message from the youth). In a study on the origins of nationalism and the constituencies of national boundaries Anderson (1983) refers to nations as ‘imagined communities’. In the name of these communities people are sometimes prepared to die or else, to unconditionally give up resources like money (mutatis: or paying too much for a

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191 Commenting on *ConsInp* before I have used the expression ‘responded in kind’ several times, I think this renders the idea of how brave Diesel consumers are.

branded item) or time (mutatis: spending an entire night outside to get hold of that particular special edition item). As nations have their flags, other, more ephemeral and less defined forms of community are also kept together by ways of symbolic, but necessarily physical or virtual (digital) interaction. That signs and symbols in social interactionism are being rediscovered and widespread in postmodern ‘fragmented’ times (Piet 2006) may be another confirmation of the ‘tribalisation’ of society suggested by Maffesoli.

According to Zygmunt Bauman (2005) consumption, as opposed to possession, is the postmodern means to show belonging. The choice of some brands instead of others is increasingly based on their symbolic value, which explains why marketing and design are gaining attention as means for differentiation (cfr section 1-4). It is in this respect that Algesheimer et al. (2005) for instance consider products and brands as ‘totems’. The more people find meaning in that totem, the broader the micropolitical system to which it refers. At the same time the more people feel emotionally attracted to the brand (and to each-other through the brand), the more stable the value connection between the brand and its consumers. A glue value of HyPo III is therefore perhaps to be sought after by companies aiming at creating a global, stable brand. This glue value category stood for allegiance with ideological, rhetoric values strongly reflecting extant trends and these values are shared in a specific society and historical context and eventually trigger gatherings on a massive scale (see table 7-1). These are typically the values represented by models like the LOV (List of Values) or VALS (Values Attitudes and Lifestyles) or similar that stem from motivational analyses and this explains why these models are so popular. At the same time though I have commented on their apparent limitations in section 2-4 as they mostly reflect a reductionist, quantitative approach to research. The fact that these models are so popular, however, could also imply that they work. Indeed the categories implied in these macro socio demographic models refer to HyPo category III. Values in category III are shared amongst large parts of the population, and are often stronger incentives for imitative – e.g. purchasing – behaviour than values represented by cultural systems on smaller (like a sports club) or larger (the ‘creative class’) levels.

Although the Mini was introduced to stop ‘damn German bubble cars’ from invading Great Britain, the question still holds why it became an icon of ‘Britishness’. Stereotypes implying

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193 “Why is this man doing what I am doing [sic] There is only one answer once one has learnt it: ‘Because we…are…”” (ibid: 54).

194 Increasingly so, considering the popularity of e.g. the world or EU football championships, or the growing political attention to defining national ‘identities’.
typical national values\textsuperscript{195} can be considered on a HyPo III level as well and are mostly emergent (Leerssen 2000). The recursive relationship (working through feedback loops) between the cultural meaning of a brand and its tendency to trigger socialising behaviour contributes to the stabilisation of its values: the more ‘cool’ people use it, the more it becomes ‘cool’ (with a little help from the brand’s managers perhaps), and the more ‘cool’ people must use it. Eventually though, the meaning of the brand stabilises.

The communities created by Diesel and MINI are more ‘imagined’ than those created by Innocent and Mini (hence their different glue values) but still, I detect some ancestral identification mechanisms at work here as well.

**Interaction and reciprocation**

One of the interesting issues in the success of internet based business models is that these thrive on spontaneous inputs from consumers, i.e. on the willingness of consumers to spontaneously create and share information.\textsuperscript{196} We have seen how more or less explicit calls made by brands to interact with them have generated responses ‘in kind’, and especially when these calls involve helping others (e.g. Innocent’s Big Knit campaign) the reactions were surprising even for managers.

Equity theory suggests that a return, a payoff in terms of a feeling of equity or justice (equal distribution of resources) is influencing people's behaviour more than the prospect of being better off individually. In other words, if one’s payoff share is smaller than that of another player without a reasonable cause, than one often refuses that share, even if from a monetary perspective that means being worse off (Bolton and Ockenfels 2000). In fact reciprocation might sound strategic, which means one could decide to return a favour only when a future reward is expected, which is also what game theory predicts (i.e. the ‘shadow of the future’, Axelrod, 1984: 124). From an evolutionary perspective though, there is not necessarily a calculative reasoning behind the decision to reciprocate (animals sometimes also reciprocate, and domesticated ones reciprocate with humans). Insights from evolutionary psychology suggest that reciprocation constitutes a selective module informing preference formation, next to the other selective modules of survival, reproduction and kin selection (Saad 2007: 111, 156).

\textsuperscript{195} E.g. the Dutch ‘nuchterheid’ or ‘gezelligheid’, or the German ‘pünktlichkeit’, Swedish ‘modron’, Italian ‘dolce vita’, Spanish ‘manana’, and so on.

\textsuperscript{196} See e.g. the special issue in *Marketing Theory* September 2011 vol. 11 no. 3.
Altruism seems to be so much ingrained in our psychological ‘set up’ that it must have played a role in the evolution of the human species. This might be the result of a process of gene-culture co-evolution (cfr box 2-2) as humans are better at socialising than other species (with a less evolved culture). In other words the much praised and aspired after real ‘brave’ individualists have long been extinguished (if they ever existed). Group selection is now widely accepted within evolutionary theory, and even in business economics (Jacobs 2012). So here as well some ancestral mechanisms seem to explain the effects in terms of glue value of the interactive marketing approaches of our brands. Reciprocation however does not necessarily lead to co-evolution, as we have seen that the brands mostly led the valuation ‘dance’.

**Games and play**

Play is an element that is present in the marketing of all four cases. In fact I have defined one more manipulative marketing approach as the creation of a *playground where the border between public and private fades*. Raessens (2009:64), citing Huizinga, talks about the post-postmodern advent of the Homo Ludens, probably as opposed to the more serious, modern Homo Faber. The impression Raessens gives is that we now live in times in which playfulness has become very serious, as it is not restricted anymore to the private but also to the public, commercial and even political spheres. Play and games, as also Huizinga would contend, always *played* an important role in society. To my knowledge gladiators in Rome also had a political and social function; medieval duels were quite serious games, and one could even interpret popular mythology as a kind of virtual game, as Maffesoli suggests (Maffesoli 1988). In his account on neo-tribes and the power of a collective ‘puissance’ he underlines the relationship play and games have with power. According to this author games were and still are used by the ‘hedonist elite’ as “many tyrants and various powers [...] were unstinting in providing their populace with its quantum of games in order to keep the peace” (ibid: 52). Play is, however, not necessarily a form of modern ‘top down’ control. 197 Playfulness, in the sense of deception and curiosity, is also typical of communities that have evolved to resist grand rulers like that of the city of Naples (Maffesoli 1988:50).

To play however, one does not necessarily need a game with set rules. There is a difference between the concepts of play and game. In a game rewards are explicit, whereas in play or playfulness these are more implicit, emotional and difficult to quantify. By asking consumers

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197 In the modern 50s and 60s e.g. strips and cartoons were considered as not serious, inferior forms of information.
to play games, brands ask consumers to give up resources, time, money, energy. In return these consumers receive specific information, or discounts, but a value connection is mostly the result of emotional rewards like attention or pleasure and fun. The ‘smile effect’ or grin on one’s face when seeing the smoke coming out the MINI’s headlights on a two dimensional advertisement can be considered in these terms: an implicit reward for stopping and looking at the advertisement.

The playground is sometimes totally created by a company through a number of rewards and punishments. This involves the formulation of explicit rules, i.e. the creation of a sort of game. Several customer relationship management systems are based on this idea: rewarding consumers for their purchasing behaviour, keeping into account their personal preferences (with the help of digital databases) but acting upon calculative levers. According to French and Raven (1959) rewards and punishments are two of the five sources of power one can use to make other people do things that they otherwise would not do (Emerson’s 1962 definition of power). Other sources are: expertise, role performance and identification. We could interpret these in relation to marketing and manipulation: one can prefer a product because it gives access to capabilities (a bread making machine) or else because it performs consistently well (role performance implies predictability, hence reliability) or because buying that product ‘says something’ about the consumer (i.e. symbolic interaction).

In the realm of game studies a distinction is made between *Ludus* and *Paida* (Raessens 2009). The distinction is similar to what we saw the difference between game an play is. In ludus terms consumers respond and act upon the rules the company set and in a paida situation consumers reinvent the rules of the game (cfr also the capacity of neo-tribes to hijack the company’s proposition in section 2-8). Now, we have seen that consumers have mostly been reacting ‘in kind’ to the initiatives of the companies in question, but are sometimes left with the impression they are determining the rules. So, for instance Innocent consumers gather spontaneously and decide what kinds of caps (akin to identities) to give to the smoothie bottle, or Diesel consumers engage online with Diesel employees hijacked by models (the Heidi’s campaign) to tell them what to do: marketing on the edge between Ludus and Paida.

So, coming back to the question of how manipulation has changed in postmodern times, in my view the Homo Ludens is as old if not older than the Homo Sapiens, but with the advent of the Homo Faber a distinction occurred between serious and unserious activities (cfr also the modernistic distinction between high and low arts). Now games and play are allowed again
and companies make grateful – marketing – use of the ingrained human willingness to engage and be challenged.

Now that we have seen the contribution of more subtle, unintended mechanisms that explain the contribution of marketing to the establishment of a value connection between companies and consumers, we can turn to the intended side of strategic marketing activities again to see if we can conclude by discerning different strategic approaches and comment on the context in which these are most effective.

Box 7-1: Metamodern marketing?

Some argue that now, after modernism, postmodernism and hypermodernism, metamodern times have arrived. The proponents of the term Metamodernism, van den Akker and Vermeulen, define it as follows: “meta, for us, signifies an oscillation, a swinging or swaying with and between future, present and past, here and there and somewhere; with and between ideals, mindsets, and positions.” The indeterminacy implicit in this definition is definitely appealing because it describes a kind of meta-stable state of consumers’ preference for, for instance, one specific brand, a state that because of its inherent indeterminacy can quickly shift in the face of the introduction of new products, brands or styles. I think metamodernism as defined above is, however, not a new artistic, societal, philosophical or humanistic movement, but rather a mere acknowledgment of a fundamental state of things which is anything but new. As a matter of fact postmodern authors also acknowledged indeterminacy as a necessary state; if you wish, also Nietzsche’s nihilism is a state of indeterminacy, and perhaps even Heraclitus acknowledges that when stating that ‘panta rhei’. Indeterminacy is also the foundation of quantum theory (Eisenberg’s cat being alive and dead at the same time…).

This definition of the term ‘meta’ may be best understood by looking at it in complexity theory, where ‘metastability’ is not so much stability or instability but a ‘next to stable’ state (Ball, 2004: 201). This natural condition is comparable with a ‘phase transition’ state, i.e. the indeterminacy situation between e.g. the solid and liquid states of a chemical element. Looking at the effects of metastability in time, some evolutionary theorists observe that — longitudinal — patterns are characterised by ‘punctuated equilibrium’, or a pattern of alternation between stability and sudden change (Beinhocker 2006: 173) or a long stability period followed by abrupt change (think of the apparent calm of a dormant volcano). Chaos and complexity theories further explain how the state in-between order and chaos, characterised by moderate entropy, is the only state where self-organisation and therefore life is possible (Waldrop, 1992). In the words of Neil Johnson (2009: 56): “patterns are produced by objects that are neither systematic nor completely random, in other words: objects just like us. So it seems we really do live in some kind of middle-ground”. And that middle-ground does not lend itself to be fully comprehended in analytical terms; these kinds of dynamics ask for interpretive, qualitative, mostly descriptive methods in marketing. The description of a metastable state is only possible if you take issues like ‘path dependency’ and qualitative descriptions of the idiosyncrasies of a system into account. Even in the analysis of financial markets scholars start to realise the limitations of ‘numbers’; in the words of Markose

(2005:28): “a meta stable state is one in which a system spends a very long period of time in terms of intermediate time scales and typically such behaviour of the system cannot be analytically determined” (italics added).

7-7 Unstuck in the middle

Now that I have clarified what probably where some of the more unconscious mechanisms of the emergent marketing strategy of the companies I have studied, we can finally turn to considering the whole picture, i.e. the relation between glue value, marketing, and the social and historical contexts in which these brands thrived.

To start with: what is the relation between the glue value of the brand and the extent to which company executives have been ‘trying hard’ to steer consumer perceptions and behaviour? In figure 7-8 I have put the glue value on the vertical axis, and the supply-side of the HyPo dimension on the horizontal one.

![Figure 7-8: Marketing around the edge](image)

In sum: Mini did not try very hard and achieved a glue value of IV, on the opposite side MINI did try hard to achieve a glue value of II, whereas Innocent and Diesel adopted more similar marketing approaches to position the brands in categories III and II respectively. In the previous section we have seen that the difference between these last outcomes is largely due to the ‘childish’ elements in Innocent’s packaging and external communications which we have named ‘pedomorphism’. Pedomorphism also explains, to a large extent, the positioning of Mini in glue value category IV. It is, however, also true that Mini was not the only car with similar features at the time (think of the Citroen 2CV, BMW Isetta, VW Beatle or the Fiat...
So what is it about the marketing of Mini that explains the fervent activity of consumers around the car? BMC executives did something to promote the car but not too much. Compared to MINI one can say that Mini happened to be at the right place at the right time (London in the 60s), but also that it got a little help. The marketing of MINI was very much aimed at giving the car a personality, but maybe BMW executives tried too hard to do so. Now we must take into consideration the social and historical contexts in which the brands grew, because the demand side of the HyPo dimension is not solely the result of what company executives did.

Looking back at figure 7-5 we see that Diesel’s consumers have been more reactive to the brand’s marketing initiatives than MINI’s, whereas Diesel has also been more experimental and tentative in its marketing efforts than MINI, to get the same kind of results in terms of glue value. This might be explained by the fact that Diesel was more reliant on extant trends, on the zeitgeist, in its marketing than MINI. In other words MINI had to ‘try harder’ because it was further detached from extant social discourses.

The connection Innocent consumers have with the brand is of a more personal nature (the value of AVd is higher for Innocent than for Diesel) which I have explained by the fact that, whereas Diesel managed to create an imagined community that goes beyond national and time boundaries, Innocent referred to communities that were existing, less imagined and more defined in historical and geographical terms.

For Mini the combination of minimal marketing and the social, historical context in which the car was introduced largely explains its success. Innocent and Diesel may have adopted a more adaptive approach than MINI, but they have also managed to keep the lead of the valuation dance. From the discussion above we can see how the glue values of the brands are also the result of the hypermodern or postmodern nature of the marketing strategy. Thus a company must make choices there, depending on its kind of branding and business strategy. However also the social context does play an important role in the establishment of a particular type of glue value. In table 7-4 I have summarised the main characteristics of the marketing strategy.

Clearly, looking for extremes of the HyPo dimension does not pay off. On the left side of the dimension in figure 7-3 we should think of the image problem Facebook is starting to have, as consumers get wary knowing that data are used to predict and address their behaviour. Several communities therefore start creating their own social media software to bypass Facebook. On the other hand waiting for consumers to ‘do the job’ and letting them go can lead to either a strong value connection with a too small group of consumers, or possibly to creating unwanted associations with the brand that cannot be repaired easily.
approaches of the brands I have analysed in the top row, and shown their relation with the socio-cultural context in the bottom row.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marketing approach</th>
<th>Diesel</th>
<th>Innocent</th>
<th>Mini</th>
<th>MINI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creating an imagined community through double-edginess, interaction and play.</td>
<td>‘Getting personal’ by ways of pedomorphism.</td>
<td>Minimal actions, not explicitly eliciting interaction but adding ‘small corrections’.</td>
<td>‘Getting too personal’. Define the target group in detail and focus all marketing activity to achieve a specific effect (personalisation).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation to the socio-historical context</td>
<td>Strong reliance on trends. At the same time continuously anticipating the zeitgeist in order not to be ‘too much’ identified with trends.</td>
<td>The brand becomes iconic, an expression of temporary trends.</td>
<td>The brand becomes iconic, an expression of of the zeitgeist.</td>
<td>Allegiance to a broader need to ‘stand out from the crowd’ in the definition of the target market.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7-4: Main marketing approaches and their relation to the socio-cultural context

So it seems that the first and most important decision that informs the nature of subsequent marketing actions to be taken is the extent to which the values implied in a company’s proposition are reliant on the extant zeitgeist, on current trends; in other words: what are the cultural systems of reference for the interpretation of the brand’s values? In this respect, for instance, opening up foreign markets would mean broadening the cultural system(s) of reference, and as a consequence to succeed with a value proposition in one country does not necessarily mean succeeding in others, as the Innocent case illustrated quite clearly. What does that mean for the HyPo nature of the marketing approach? Going back to the value connection pyramid in figure 7-3 this is tantamount to asking: what are the consequences of positioning decisions in tiers 1 and 2 for tiers 3 and 4?

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200 In the table I have used the term ‘zeitgeist’ to indicate a broader (in time and space) social sentiment, whereas I used the word trend to refer to more specific sentiments. So e.g. ‘individualisation’ is the zeitgeist, whereas ‘health’ or ‘environmentalism’ are trends. Sometimes this distinction is referred to as the difference between macro- and mesotrends.
7-8 Hyper- or postmodern solutions to the marketing crisis?

After this whole analysis a first conclusion seems to be that in general a glue value of II, or between II and III, is the most desired situation to achieve for a brand, given that it means having a somewhat stronger value connection with quite a large number of people. This is achieved by a marketing approach that implies interaction, but where the company tries to retain some control over consumer activity concerning the brand (between categories II and III in figure 7-2). A higher glue value might imply that the company’s image consists of values that are too localised, leading to having a number of customers that is too small to generate enough revenues, and / or to an image that may be difficult to ‘get rid of’. A lower glue value might imply that the symbolic, social relevance of the brand is so low that differentiation can only be based on price, leading to the need for higher turnovers and economies of scale to retain margins.

But is this the solution to the marketing crisis? Obviously the ‘middle way’ is not necessarily the best choice or the only possibility, and neither one gives us a satisfactory answer to the question posed in the introduction. The espoused views about alternative solutions to this crisis are quite opposing indeed: can consumers be analysed in order to manipulate their perceptions and even their behaviour? Or are consumers inherently unpredictable and are all attempts to understand and predict their behaviour totally futile? A middle way choice is tantamount to not being able to make a choice amongst these differing views, and the inevitability of such a choice is the very rationale of this study. Michael Porter has warned us not to get ‘stuck in the middle’ when he meant that strategic choices must be differentiating and clear (Porter 1996), so let’s see if the companies I have studied did make clear choices concerning their glue values and marketing strategy, and what we can conclude from that.

The difference between the glue values of Diesel and Innocent shows that Diesel succeeded in creating a value connection with more consumers over a longer period of time by leveraging on values that go beyond national or historical identifications. Innocent, however, got stuck within a more localised British reference system, showing that Innocent’s founders did not make very explicit long-term choices concerning broader cultural reference systems in case of growth from the beginning. So, we could conclude that in order to keep a glue value of III, as a company grows its marketing should probably become more hypermodern, at least in the sense of approaching broader cultural reference systems, and be more defined in the

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201 A kind of equilibrium between the kind of value connection required for higher consumer loyalty, and the possible amount of loyal consumers.
formulation of its brand values (cfr the formulation of the brand values in Diesel and Innocent: the latter were ‘emergent’ and not formulated in relation to consumer- but corporate culture). In other words when a brand is growing it is imperative to fill-in the lower tiers of the value connection pyramid more accurately (figure 7-3), and marketing has to become more hypermodern (see figure 7-2). As a matter of fact that is precisely what BMW did when it took over the Mini brand and transformed that into MINI (to start making money with the brand, see box 7-2).

Box 7-2 Glue- or money-value?

In chapter 2 I have introduced the concept of the glue value of brands as an indicator of the social and cultural relevance of a brand for consumers. I have briefly mentioned (cfr sections 2-9 and 7-3) that the glue value is not an indicator of the strength of a brand (as e.g. in Aaker 1995), and neither of the strength the value connection of a brand has with consumers (as e.g. in Roberts 2005). This also means that there is not a direct, proportional relationship between the glue value of a brand and it’s financial results. When looking at financial results one must make a distinction between profits and revenues. While changes in the latter give an approximate indication of the quantities sold (if prices are not changing too much), profits are more dependent on e.g. cost-structures, price-setting strategies and other business factors. In other words, a strong (famous) brand and a strong value connection do not guarantee financial growth. A case in point is Mini.

Although BMC managers always claimed that the Mini ‘made money’ (Laban 2005) several accounts show how the combination of too low prices and low fixed costs per car always undermined its financial results.202 The Times of the 23 November 1965 mentions: “BMC’s Mini range has certainly proved a success as sales are concerned, but the competitive pricing has bitten deeply into profit margins” moreover “BMC’s net profit on each Mini has been little more than 5 pounds”. According to Brian Laban’s (2005) ‘Little book of Mini’ the car suffered from a high proportion of variable to fixed costs (about 10-15% of total costs) and hence the turnover had to be quite high to be able to make some profit. Turnover was high, at least compared to the turnover of the current MINI-BMW models (see underneath): about 200,000 cars were produced per year from 1962 to 1977.

In other accounts of the history of the Mini we find expressions like “small car small profit” and that the car had “inherently narrow margins” (cfr the BBC documentary on iconic British brands that failed to make money, mentioned in chapter 5). According to BMC officials the Mini represented on average some 25% of BMC’s total turnover, and the overhead was also spread over other models. Later in the 80s the car became iconic (e.g. in Japan, were about 25% of the Minis were sold) and was positioned in a more ‘premium’ market.

Manufacturing costs, however, could not be reduced and in 1992 a high turnover was still the only way for the brand to survive. In 1981 Austin Rover started offering special editions but profit margins remained very low as “by the early 90s Mini was a niche product, not anymore a mass-market car”.203 British Leyland’s executive

202 To fully exploit economies of scale.

Lord Stokes declares that the company was losing 20 pounds per car and that they were cannibalising sales of more profitable cars as “the more they sold, the more they lost”.\textsuperscript{204}

MINI on the contrary has made money from its inception in 2001. When BMW took over the brand, sales were higher than expected. Prospected sales increased from 100,000 units per year in 2001 to about 300,000 at the end of 2002. The Birmingham Post of the 8 May 2002 boasts: “Roaring success of MINI helped drive up profit of BMW” (italics added) and mentions it had ‘contributed disproportionally’ to the group’s sales growth. According to car analyst Bedwell\textsuperscript{205} it generated a “net income of 148$ mln in 2003, 285 in 2005 and 260 in 2007” hence “MINI has been a phenomenal success”. According to another analyst the price position of the new model is the same as in the 90s old model, but BMW is able to produce at much lower cost relatively. Consequently profitability is much better.\textsuperscript{206}

Ten years after its introduction MINI is still showing record sales (about 185 thousand units in 2011, as from BMW’s financial statement). The latest model, the MINI coupè, sold 3,800 units from September to December 2012.\textsuperscript{207} So it seems safe to say that if the British managed to convey glue value to the brand, the Germans managed to create money value.

Italians managed to do both. As Renzo Rosso says: “what is really important is the brand, and one must not force it, otherwise fashion becomes like a supermarket”.\textsuperscript{208} Maybe the founder of Diesel understood quite well where the borders lie between sound business and brand building. Since its inception in 1978 only in 2011 he was forced to fire some 35 employees, for reasons of internal reorganisation, but he still has plans of expansion by diversification under the parent holding Only The Brave (OTB).\textsuperscript{209}

Between 2007 and 2009, the period of the financial crisis, the OTB holding lost a relatively small percentage of sales from resp. 1.3 to 1.23 billion Euro per year (the Diesel brand accounting for about 1 million, of which about 80% from clothing, and of that amount 35% from the sale of denim), and still counts as one of the largest fashion companies, at least in Italy (number 5, after Benetton and after Prada and Armani that both account for about 1.6 billion Euro turnover).\textsuperscript{210} That the company also manages to generate money is evident from its consistent growth due to re-investments of profits (operational margins grew with 50% in 2004, and by 2009 the company had 5.453 employees, owned 323 shops and started opening new ones in India and Japan. In 2010

it had 200 more employees than in 2009, and generated a profit of 46 million Euro). The company has shown an average return on investment of about 7%.

I have shown in section 5-2 how Innocent has quickly gained brand awareness and market share (both about 70% some 6 years after the start cfr table 5-1) as well as revenues, as evidenced in the graph reproduced here.

![Figure 7-9: Revenues of Innocent Drinks (millions of pounds).](http://ricerca.gelocal.it/mattinopadova/archivio/mattinodipadova/2011/10/27/NZ_11_01.html)

Interestingly though, the financial crisis of 2008 did hit revenues hard. For one thing, the company had invested heavily in international expansion, aiming to be one of the world’s favourite ‘sustainable’ food businesses. On the other hand, at the time of the financial crisis a similar product was made by larger competitors (e.g. Chiquita in continental Europe) and consumers were easily drawn towards cheaper (private label) alternatives. In fact, according to several accounts (cfr chapter 5), the selling of a stake of the company to Coca-Cola in 2009 was mainly due to two reasons: 1) the need for a cash injection and 2) to push the product through EU distribution channels (and thereby closing local, e.g. the Dutch, marketing offices).

However, not only size matters in the decision for a particular marketing approach.

Considering Diesel and Mini one could argue that if Diesel managed to create and control a particular reference system (an imagined community), Mini was aiming less at creating and controlling such a system, but may have become successful for that very reason. So, when should what kind of marketing strategy be applied?

With the help of figure 7-8 three kinds of marketing strategies can be identified. Ordered from the left to the right side of the HyPo dimension (figure 7-6) these are: 1) trying (too) hard (MINI), 2) co-evolving (but keeping the lead, e.g. Diesel and Innocent) and 3) giving a little

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help (Mini). Saying that MINI tried ‘too hard’ means that for this brand a co-evolutionary approach possibly would have led to an image that was less discriminating, more ‘friendly’, and hence with a broader appeal (a value connection with a larger group of people). So before deciding upon a marketing strategy, i.e. before filling in tiers 3 and 4 of the value connection pyramid, managers should define and keep in mind the first two tiers. This consideration leads to the formulation of three propositions.

Proposition 1, HyPo I-II: *When the values included in the proposition of a firm are referring to individual benefits, like efficiency or attractiveness, then the firm can try hard to predict consumer perceptions and behaviour.*

This is the case for most companies that base their value proposition on functional attributes of a product. The interpretation of their values only slightly hinges upon socio-cultural context. A company like Google has efficiency as a core value (why else would you want a search ‘engine’?) hence collecting and analysing user data can lead to more personalised and more efficient results. Other similar companies, like Amazon, also have efficiency and speed as a ‘raison d’être’ (tier 1 of the pyramid), and I must admit that sometimes I am happy with the suggestions Amazon sends me concerning books that I might find of interest based on my past buying behaviour. For a dry-pasta producer it is extremely valuable to understand where and why people prefer penne or spaghetti, and for McDonald’s not to be innovative in food products and instead offer variations on local dishes (presuming people like those and hence have more predictable demand patterns) is a way to create stronger value connections and to increase its efficiency (and lower its prices).

Slightly moving to the right of the glue value qualifier, for brands that base their value proposition on emotional values that enhance an individual’s feeling of distinction from the crowd, predictability is more difficult, but developing and maintaining a strong vision is a way to control markets by influencing them (Hamel and Prahalad (1995) in this respect talk about ‘corporate imagination’). I found that Diesel did so to a large extent by developing and maintaining a very strong vision from its inception. We have also seen Harley Davidson, that, despite all the peer activity around the brand, is a good example of how a strong and consistent vision can also lead to a strong and consistent brand-recognition (and high prices).
Proposition 2, HyPo III: *When the values included in the proposition of a firm are referring to the zeitgeist, or to broader cultural systems like e.g. national ones, then systematically eliciting interaction can lead to a stable and consistent image within that cultural reference system.*

Compared to Diesel, Innocent also had a strong vision, but this vision was more apt to change. In other words, Innocent had a more co-evolutionary approach than Diesel, but never fundamentally changed its value proposition. So, co-evolution in both cases is more or less ‘biased’ towards the company. Many contemporary brands fall in this category. One case that I find particularly interesting in this respect, is that of the British clothing brand Barbour. This wax-jacket has been an icon of a generation in the 80s and has lately, after a period of decline, somehow ‘come back’. The company was aware of differences in the perception of the product. So 1) it developed new finishes for Latin, Germanic and British countries and 2) it created a larger share of ‘fashionable’ products to cater to women (as a result of market research). It also managed to always keep the same, ‘royal’ image.\(^\text{212}\) These kinds of approaches are akin to what Wiltbank et al. (2006: 984) call ‘transformative’ approaches which are characterised by a high reliance on a company’s resources (new finishes and textiles for Barbour) and, at the same time, by continuous action and re-action. It assumes that markets are endogenous, i.e. these approaches allow for interdependency between companies and consumers and therefore must include flexibility but more informed by the company’s resources than by consumer’s alleged preferences. Therefore companies are in the lead.

Proposition 3, HyPo IV-V: *When the values included in the value proposition of a firm are not clearly defined, then a firm can find ways to support smaller, emergent cultural reference systems to co-evolve with these by tinkering, i.e. trying out and eventually intervene with ‘small corrections’.*

Maybe these are the most interesting cases because they are the least predictable.\(^\text{213}\) We have seen how Mini’s executives in the 50s did not imagine, let alone predict, the success the brand

\(^{212}\) From interviews with Barbour shop-keepers. See also http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-524329/Waxing-Lyrical-Why-Barbour-suddenly-rock-n-roll.html February 2012.

\(^{213}\) We know from complexity theory that smaller networks, or smaller systems, are more susceptible to immediate changes, or ‘cascades’ than larger ones. Here the meta-stable states do not last long.
would gain. The values of the car arose because of what consumers did with it. Marketing executives subsequently leveraged upon spontaneous associations with the brand, for instance with ‘trendy’ advertisements or supporting rally activities, but never explicitly asking consumers to interact with the brand. Wipperfurth (2006) analyses cases of ‘brand hijack’ to develop models to address hijacking activities. Among others he finds that the way to address microcultures should be tailored to these microcultures, to become congruent with the product’s characteristics as well (the product is, as it were, a ‘given’ of the value proposition). Wipperfurth for instance mentions the case of Dikies, an American trousers producer who, intending to make the product ‘cool’ again, chose not to advertise in ‘cool’ magazines (as MINI did) but in workwear specialist magazines, i.e. it made the product ‘cool’ by portraying it as definitely not cool. Another example of how taking distance from communities can be a way to establish a value connection is that of Pabst beer. That brand got so much out of fashion that it became an icon of ‘normality’. A few celebrities boasted the brand more or less by chance (like Mini in the 60s!) and people started liking it because “it was scarce, cheap, and plagued by persistent rumours of imminent bankruptcy”. No-marketing was the best marketing and helped the brand grow further. But the newly appointed marketing manager, in subtle ways, made sure the beer was at the right places at the right moments.

What I have done in this section is to relate the kind of marketing strategy to the socio-cultural context that is necessary to interpret and understand the value proposition of a company. Decisions about the value proposition of a company are an exercise of strategy formulation. Strategic marketing activities involve decisions about how to communicate and convey the value proposition to – prospective – consumers (see chapter 1, on the definitions of marketing). So considering the value connection pyramid again, what strategy scholars typically do is to explain tiers 1 and 2. What marketing scholars typically do is explain tiers 3 and 4. What I try to do is to explain how these tiers relate to each other.

On how marketing adds value to Treacy and Wiersema’s value disciplines

In the propositions above I refer to a brand’s values as described in the glue value qualifier. Looking back to my three propositions in relation to the HyPo range of solutions to the marketing crisis, it appears that the conclusions are very much similar to what Treacey and

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Wiersema (1995) define as the three ‘value disciplines’ a company can focus on. These are: operational excellence, product leadership and customer intimacy.

Operational excellence involves the value of efficiency. To become industry leader in terms of price and convenience a company should invest in rendering production and distribution processes as cost-effective as possible, and in capillary distribution. In this case the value proposition involves functional values, explicit and measurable benefits. For that reason marketing should aim at ‘trying hard’ to predict consumer perceptions and behaviour. That is possible to a large extent because benefits are more objectively measurable, and hence easier to explain and ascertain. Consequently more accurate production and distribution planning is required to reduce production and inventory costs and engage in a virtuous cycle of continuous growth.

Product leadership involves producing a continuous stream of state of the art products, high investments in ‘research and development’ and in process flexibility. This kind of strategy is similar to what I have described under proposition 2 above as attempts to control the market by influencing it. However, just focusing on product innovation may be limiting. We have seen that, from the 90s on, Diesel has been innovative mainly in transactional innovations, or in marketing. Continuous (marginal) innovation in products and marketing is one way to influence perceptions of consumers, in the hope to influence their behaviour (cfr figure 73, class II). I would add the word ‘design’ to Treacey and Wiersema’s focus on research and development. We have seen in the previous section how aesthetic cues in the packaging and advertisement of products (next to those in the products themselves) contribute to the establishment of a strong emotional value connection between brands and consumers. This shows how marginal innovations in the ways companies and consumers interact (i.e. marketing) can have the same, if not stronger, effects than innovations in products and business processes. And the current spreading of fashion as a system of continuous marginal innovation in sectors other than the clothing sector is testimony to that effect.

Customer intimacy finally implies investments in tailored production and relationship marketing to achieve higher long-term loyalty and hence customer profitability. The term intimacy typically refers to a one-to-one kind of relationship (which I would rather have with a person than with a company…). However, in my study I have shown how a more emotional relation is necessarily based on adding values to a microcultural system of reference.

Moreover, the term intimacy requires the ‘intimated’ party to be active, or at least overtly receptive to the ‘intimator’s’ proposition. In other words, in this case ‘trying too hard’ can result in aversion. Therefore the marketing approach that is most suited is best reflected in proposition 3, that is the least predictable one as it involves just ‘doing something’ (e.g. place-based marketing, or humouristic actions) in the hope that in a certain micro culture that action will be valued. Then a company should understand that micro culture and intervene with subtle reactions, with small corrections, and hope the brand achieves a high linking or glue value within that system.

Concluding there seems to be no univocal solution, or answer to the question if solutions to the marketing crisis should be of a hyper- or postmodern kind, but the context in terms of brand values, kind of business and social developments do give us an indication of what marketing strategy is best adopted. Acknowledging that consumers organise themselves to give meaning to what companies propose, implies that the outcomes of marketing as an activity of creating valuable connections with consumers are inevitably the result of the social and cultural contexts of where the brand operates. Even more so, brands contribute to shaping socio-cultural contexts because they are part of them.

As Cova et al. (2002) suggest: we are more in the business of *societing* than in that of marketing. Such an approach to marketing studies is often considered a southern, Mediterranean, Latin one (idem: 3), but for the sake of intersubjectivity, I must admit that my sympathy for such an approach could be due to my own Latin cultural system of reference.