

Purposeful Brands or Brands with Purpose: What are They and How Can We Be a Part of Them.

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Introduction: Brands with purpose

Late last year, Forbes (Aziz, 2019) quoted a very interesting report by Kantar, a company that most of us know due their constant data gathering and the usefulness of that knowledge in our day-to-day business and/or research tasks. Kantar developed a fascinating study called Purpose 2020 (Kantar, 2019). This study demonstrated that brands with a perceived positive impact outperformed the brands that did not have such an impact. In this regard, the brands that were recognised for having a high commitment to purpose had grown at more than twice the rate of others. To be more precise, over a period of 12 years, the *purposeful brands* had a brand value growth of 175% against an 86% and 70% growth for brands that were classified medium or low, respectively, in terms of purpose. The report cited Toyota, General Electric, Nike, UPS, Walmart and Google as examples of brands with purpose. The mere fact of Kantar conducting research on this topic and Forbes acknowledging it, should be more than enough for the business world to start taking it seriously.

What is purpose, exactly?

From the previous introduction to the topic, it is clear that the term 'purpose' is far from being clearly

defined. Like a baby that's just been born, purpose acquires new characteristics every day. Authors De Swaan, Van den Driest and Weed (2014) describe purpose as the functional, emotional, and societal benefits of the brand's offering. More recently, Brodin and Sand (2016) define brand purpose as the reason for which a brand exists as often expressed in a sentence or statement, while noting that the definition is not well-established in traditional literature and the amount of research on the topic is insubstantial. A recent study by Hsu (2017) notes that millennials are more attracted to brands with purpose. Further, the Kantar study (2019) confirms that millennials majorly (61%) look for purposeful brands. When we talk about millennials, we are referring to people born between 1980 and 1995. After this category, we have Generation Z, that includes those born between 1995 and 2015. If we were to define purpose, we would go along very similar terms to those stated by De Swaan, Van den Driest and Weed (2014). Purpose is a brand's commitment to improve itself, the others and the environment. This is why when a brand talks about purpose, it is talking about a way to help and improve the company, society and the ecosystem. If we take into account that more than 60% of both millennials and Generation Z base their preference for a brand over whether or not it has a purpose, we could also define purpose as a full, 360-degree commitment that gives meaning to a company in the 21st century.

If purpose is a commitment, what kind of commitment is it? To fully exist, purpose must be more than

good intentions, more than a New Year's resolution, tagline or slogan. Purpose must be something that infuses all the company, just as air infuses our lungs. In a cause-consequence binomial, it must be at both sides, at the beginning and end. It must be omnipresent. Nike's decision to endorse Kaepernick after he had become the most controversial sportsman in the United States (Abad-Santos, 2018) was not merely an advertising campaign, it was purpose. The campaign simply reflected the purpose: a set of values that Kaepernick portrayed and Nike stood for. Gillette's re-invention of their slogan 'The Best A Man Can Get', also communicated through a campaign aimed at discouraging toxic masculinity (Hinman, 2019) can be interpreted as purpose. Unilever acknowledging that as much as a third of all their customers prefer their sustainable brands (Skard *et al.*, 2020), resulting in a 69% faster growth for the sustainable ones than the rest of them in 2018, is also purpose. While far from accounting for as much revenue as the rest of the company's brands, the sole fact of having sustainable brands and the company acknowledging it as the reason for their fast growing defines purpose. In 2016, Adidas announced that it would place a million pairs of sneakers made with Parley for the Oceans recycled plastic on the market in 2017 (Castro *et al.*, 2020). While it seemed like a lofty goal then, they did it and even sold out. In 2018, the brand committed to gather even more recycled materials and produce five million pairs of sneakers, which they did again. Today, the goal is to manufacture 11 million pairs of shoes containing recycled ocean plastic. Adidas sold 409 million pairs in 2018. Eleven million may not seem like

much, but it is better than zero. Step by step, and if demand continues to grow, Adidas is likely to build more and more of their models in recycled plastics. This, again, is purpose. It seems, then, that purpose additionally makes a company stronger, nicer and more desirable. As individuals, we all have our own purposes or the purposes that we aim and fight for. These purposes are shaped by our own perception of the world, our values, culture and understanding of the meaning of life. The time has come to embrace these purposes and make them a core part of our businesses.

Generation Z, Instagram and Purpose

Without question, the Internet and social networks have changed and are still changing the relationship between companies and consumers (Fondevila Gascón, 2013). The communication field, especially that of advertising, public relations and marketing, strives to take advantage of the options offered by the Internet to attract attention and excite the public. In fact, online communication surpasses offline communication headed by social media if we speak of social matter (Pascual, 2015). If Twitter is the preferred arena for political communication (Fondevila-Gascón, Perelló-Sobrepere, 2014) we observe that Facebook and Instagram are the preferred for business and marketing approaches (CECABLE, 2019). In this regard, Instagram surpasses Facebook in the number of active users by 15% and it is also chosen primarily to develop branding and engagement for marketing strategies. This means Instagram is a must to communicate a brand's purpose on social media. The sole fact that commercial activity

is flooding mobile phones through most social networks such as Instagram, Tiktok, Snapchat and Twitch, is enough of a reason to make a brand's purpose the centre of the social media communication strategy.

When using Instagram to communicate the company's purpose, make sure to summarise the essence of the brand's purpose by employing the visual capacities of the platform. The value of a picture comes gains a whole other perspective in the case of Instagram. The word 'picture' can be substituted by the word 'video' too. Any visual aid can be on par with the audiences' tastes and preferences. Audiences that are active on a mainly visual social platform are probably there so as to enjoy quality content. Here, marketers must ensure to produce this content of the highest quality to make it interesting to the public. The content must draw the attention of both the brand's core audiences and the brand's potential audiences. It must be content that will make them understand the brand better and simultaneously learn about the brand's purpose. For instance, if an interview is recorded to further develop the company's commitment to a zero-emission supply chain, it cannot look the same on TV as it would on YouTube or Instagram. The attention span is shorter for viewers on Instagram. There are a lot of short, interesting videos to compete with. On TV and YouTube, the viewers know the videos are going to be long. On Instagram, however, one expects them to be short. It is within the nature of the platform.

Conclusion

In the year 2020, the notion of communication in business might be prompted to a game-changing point, probably the biggest change since the Internet, two-way communication model and engagement bought by social networks and applications. It won't be because of another technological change, but because of something more human, that is, *brands with purpose* or *purposeful brands*. Academic research seems to be slowly exploring the topic of purpose. There is still much left to be researched, but this article attempts to make a foray into conceptualising the importance of brand purpose. We have not only looked into what purpose is and what it means but also explored its main target, Generation Z, as well as noting collaterally the generations that come before and after, millennials and Generation Alpha, respectively. We also painted a comprehensive picture of how to properly communicate a brand's purpose through the ever-growing social platform that is Instagram and coincidentally, the one that is used the most by Generation Z. It is our forecast that purpose will become one of the hottest topics of discussion in business schools sooner or later and so business professionals of all kinds will certainly have to take this matter into serious consideration when approaching marketing and communications henceforth. It may take a few years until we get the first factual results on campaigns based on purpose. Until then, companies can either ignore the momentum or do their best to embrace the challenging changes and opportunities that purpose brings to the table. A brand's survival could be at stake and finding a purpose for it could very well be the solution to its continuity.

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