

Exploiting the Implicit

I believe it's what brands don't say that matters

Abstract

In recent years our understanding of how humans make decisions has improved considerably, but this has had little impact on most brand planning. Messages and persuasion are still central to the majority of briefs. This paper proposes a new way of looking at brand communication by broadening the perspective from explicit messages to implicit signals. Viewing brand communication through the lens of messaging can result in brands missing opportunities and at worst contradicting themselves with their behaviour. Brands need to consider how they communicate implicitly and ensure that these signals reinforce their values in every way possible.

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**“The most important thing in communication
is hearing what isn't said.”
Peter F. Drucker¹**

Introduction

“Ever since the arrival of television, brands, their owners and advisors have been obsessed with what brands say at the expense of what brands do.”

Jeremy Bullmore²

In the late summer of 1904 the New York Times reported on a German horse that could do “almost everything but talk”. The subject of the article was ‘Clever Hans’ a horse who could perform arithmetic and intellectual tasks at the level of a 9 year old child. His owner Herr Wilhelm Von Osten would ask Clever Hans a question and then provide a number of answers; at the correct answer Clever Hans would tap his right hoof. An investigation by the Prussian Minister of Education confirmed that no tricks were involved.

Not everyone was convinced; a psychologist called Oskar Pfungst decided to investigate. Pfungst discovered that the key to the horse’s intelligence lay in involuntary and unconscious cues displayed by the questioner when they reached the correct answer. Without knowing it the questioner would unconsciously lean forward slightly at the correct answer. Pfungst proved this by showing if the questioner themselves didn’t know the answer Clever Hans didn’t either.³

Clever Hans may not have been such a clever horse but he can teach brands an important lesson – unintended non-verbal implicit communication is often more powerful than the carefully composed message. While all brands communicate implicitly only some currently plan to exploit these less obvious signals.

Figure 1 – Clever Hans and his owner Herr Wilhelm Von Osten



Simply put, implicit communication is a brand's body language: The non-verbal signals a brand creates by its actions. This paper looks at how brands can harness their implicit communications more effectively to drive business advantage and stronger emotional connections.

We've known for a long time that unconscious feelings dominate human decision making but this knowledge has made few inroads into how we approach brand planning.^a Whilst there have been theories around low involvement processing, it still remains conscious engagement, key messages, awareness and cut-through ruling the roost.⁴

This focus on messages means opportunities are often missed by brands. Explicit communications are easily controlled and planned and therefore dominate thinking.⁵ But it is often signals from the brand's behaviour or other people using / talking about the brand that can have the greatest effect.

These signals are often processed unconsciously by consumers and stored as feelings which greatly affect brand preference.⁶ With the growing socialisation of life and further personalisation of media these implicit sources of communication are becoming ever more important.

I believe understanding and optimising implicit communications offers great opportunities for brands, agencies and the discipline of marketing as a whole. Specifically, I believe greater attention on implicit communications will:

- Allow a more holistic view of a brand and its communications
- Exploit the dominance of the unconscious in the decision making process
- Provide a scientific rationale to what many in marketing already know but don't have the language to evidence
- Equip us with a new practical template for building brands in the future
- Give marketers and their agencies a clear and indisputable reason to be present at the boardroom table

^a In 1903 Walter Dill Scott published 'The Psychology of Advertising in Theory and Practice' in which he states "our minds are constantly subjected to influences which we have no knowledge." A little more recently (1974) in the IPA classic 'Testing to Destruction' Alan Hedges states that advertising and purchasing decisions most often work at very low levels of consciousness.

Structure of essay

Stage 1: We think we think more than we think

Gives a brief overview of how we make decisions and what this means for brands.

Stage 2: Brands and their body language

Defines what implicit brand communications are and concludes that visibility and social signals need to be the focus of brand behaviour in the future.

Stage 3: The peacock, the gazelle and the horny toad

Proposes the concept of signalling to better understand implicit communications and explains the two drivers of signal strength: cost and intention.

Stage 4: Signal Brands

Introduces Signal Brands as a label for brands which manage and exploit their implicit communications effectively and highlights the financial and business advantage Signal Brands enjoy.

Stage 5: Four principles of Signal Brands

Establishes four principles to optimise and strengthen brand signals.

Stage 6: Building a Signal Brand

Describes two existing Signal Brands and illustrates how a Signal Brand can be built.

Stage 7: Significant implications for how we work

The final stage discusses the implications a greater focus on implicit communications has on advertising, marketing, evaluation and brand planning.

Stage 1: We think we think more than we think

How we make decisions

"Unconscious prejudices which we form are often stronger than the conscious; and they are the more dangerous, because we cannot knowingly guard against them."

W.B. Carpenter, 1874⁷

In the late nineteenth century British psychologist W.B. Carpenter determined that it was unconscious - not conscious - processes which drove the majority of human decision making. Recent advances in neuroscience, behavioural economics and psychology have added strength to Carpenter's argument.⁸ It has become accepted that our minds are dictated by emotional unconscious thinking (instinct / gut feeling), often described as System 1 thinking – a type of thinking which is fast, automatic, effortless and rooted in habit / heuristics.⁹ We can and do engage rational conscious thinking (System 2) but only when we have to.¹⁰ The differences between the two systems are summarised below:¹¹

Figure 2 – System 2 vs. System 1
Source: Author

System 2	System 1
Conscious	Unconscious
Slow	Fast
Explicit	Implicit
Analytical	Experiential
Effortful	Instinctive
Cognitive	Emotional
Propositional	Metaphoric
Messages	Signals

Marketing, market research and advertising are still firmly rooted in System 2 thinking.^b Advertising objectives continue to focus around the need to communicate a message that is persuasive, has cut-through and delivers recall - all objectives being directly **targeted** at System 2 rather than trying to **appeal** to System 1.

The dominance of System 1 suggests that the models we have historically used to understand how advertising works are wrong.¹² Understandably,

^b In a 2012 speech to the IPA Professor Daniel Kahneman gave advertisers this advice: "You must recognise that most of the time you are not talking to System 2. You're talking to System 1. System 1 runs the show. That's the one you want to move."

advertising approaches such as "salesmanship in print" and "message transmission" have been fundamentally challenged.¹³

Psychology and advertising research suggests that feelings and associations are the most important behavioural drivers, and these are less influenced by messaging and more by associations, heuristics and social copying.^{14 15}

Research from the IPA databank confirms this. Campaigns which contained little or no product message, but worked by appealing to emotions or herd instincts were shown to be twice as effective as conventional 'message' advertising.¹⁶

These emotional advertisements are explicit communication functioning in an implicit way. Implicit communication is processed unconsciously and creates associations and feelings about a brand which have a strong effect on brand preference and decisions.¹⁷

Implicit communication demands involvement

"In baiting a mousetrap with cheese, always leave room for the mouse."

Saki

Implicit communication requires the receiver to be involved in the communication as they need to 'join the dots' together themselves to create the meaning. This is similar to the philosophy of artist Marcel Duchamp who believed that creativity was "not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act."¹⁸

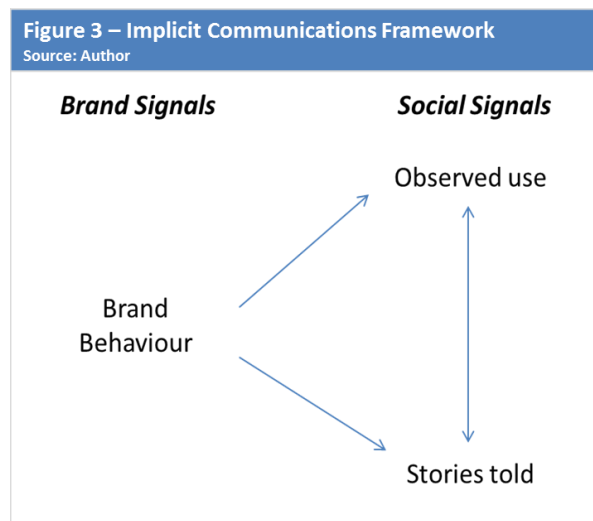
Stage 2: Brands and their body language

Implicit Brand Communications Defined

“What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say”

Ralph Waldo Emerson¹⁹

Implicit communications can be loosely described as a brand’s body language: not what the brand says, but the meaning of what it does. Unlike human body language which comes solely from the sender, a brand’s implicit communications can be determined to have three sources: brand behaviour, observed usage and stories told. The framework below shows their interaction:



Brand Signals

Brand behaviour drives brand signals

All brand encounters are processed by people implicitly (unconsciously) and occasionally explicitly (consciously). The brand’s behaviour can be described as the elements of the brand that the company controls, for example distribution, packaging, product, customer service, tone / creativity of the advertising.

Brands need to make sure that their implicit communications are in line with their brand values and made as visible as possible or the opportunity they offer will be wasted. As Byron Sharp has evidenced, brands grow when

they increase mental availability in the form of brand salience²⁰. Highly distinctive brand behaviour drives implicit communication which can build brand salience by reinforcing and deepening brand associations.²¹

Some brands fail to exploit their implicit communications. One would struggle to feel the Co-operative's strong brand values from entering their stores. They look like any other convenience store. Nothing seems to indicate in what way the brand is different. Nothing demonstrates its unique business structure or the number of community projects it funds, or its care for the environment. A poster in the store may explicitly detail these points but they need to be made clear from the visible behaviour of the brand; what the store looks like, feels like, how it operates. Everything should scream the brand values to communicate effectively with System 1.

Social Signals

There are two types of social signals which drive a brand's implicit communications:

Observed Use

The 'mere exposure effect' and social norms are well-known evidence of the influence of observed usage.²² Brands need to make sure the right people are seen using their products.^c This is becoming ever more important with the growing socialisation of actions (through tools such as Zeebox, GetGlue or Facebook connect).²³ Flooded with alternative choices and hard to spot expertise, popularity is becoming a key heuristic for consumers.²⁴

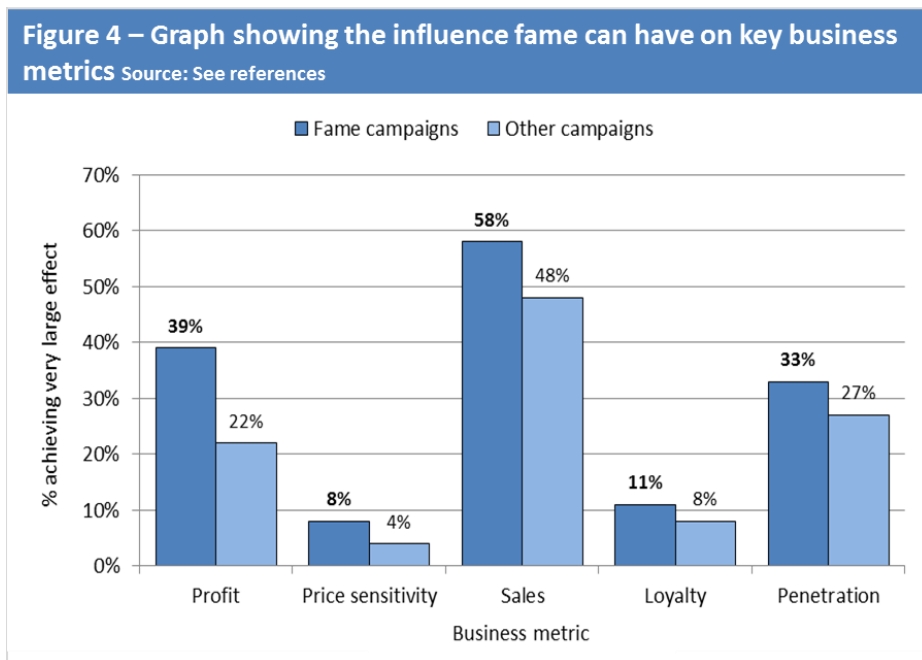
Stories Told

Many studies have shown the impact of positive word of mouth.²⁵ But looking at earned media from the perspective of implicit communication makes these encounters mean even more. The fact a brand is featured in a magazine or mentioned by a friend means more than just the mention, it shows the editorial team or friend felt the brand was relevant to the

^c A recent study showed that implicit processing of a person drinking Dasani mineral water increased the preference for Dasani when offered versus other brands. These people had not consciously seen the bottle of Dasani. This influence was significantly reduced if the person drinking Dasani was not part of their social group, even though the indicator of their social group was not consciously processed. Ferraro, R et al. The Power Of Strangers: The Effect of Incidental Consumer-Brand Encounters on Brand Choice, Journal of Consumer Research, 2008

receiver and they talk in exactly the right language about the brand.²⁶ It is the authority ‘earned media’ bestows on a brand which is the core of its power.²⁷

Studies have shown that earned media can be a driver of both price premium and profitability for a brand. In an analysis of 880 IPA case studies, campaigns which generated ‘earned media’ (described as ‘fame campaigns’ in the below analysis) were shown to deliver superior effectiveness across every business metric especially profit.²⁸ Similarly, a separate study has shown that brands with higher levels of ‘buzz’ enjoy stronger growth.²⁹ As Les Binet states “it seems we’re willing to pay much more for brands everyone’s talking about.”³⁰ Generating social signals needs to be a key objective for all brands in the future.



Stage 3:

The peacock, the gazelle and the horny toad (what brands can learn from the animal kingdom)

Signalling theory and effective implicit communications

Much current marketing language is grounded in the old world of rational decision makers, filled with terms such as “messaging” and “proposition”. A brand’s implicit communications can be better described as signalling.³¹

Signalling is a concept from evolutionary biology which is often used in economics but rarely mentioned in marketing.³² At the core of signalling is the belief that businesses are constantly communicating through their actions even when they are not intentionally communicating. Everything a brand does is a signal. Signals are automatically processed and stored as feelings making them powerful in driving brand preference and choice.³³

Looking at communications through the lens of signals considerably widens the perspective of brand planning. It makes every decision taken by the company a brand decision. Examining the difference between messaging and signals reveals how the concept of signals is a much better fit with our understanding of how people make decisions, using their feelings rather than their rational mind:

Figure 5 – Messages vs. Signals Source: Author	
Messages	Signals
Explicit	Implicit
What a brand says	Everything a brand does
Attention	Cost & intention
Added-on	Embedded
Persuasion	Feelings
Exact	Interpreted
Forced	Natural

The strength of a signal can be determined by two factors:

1. Cost

The more costly / harder it is to imitate the signal, the stronger the signal.³⁴

2. Intention

Unintentional signals are seen as more honest and therefore stronger than intended signals as they haven’t been planned as communication.³⁵

1. Cost - Costly Communications

In 1899, Thorstein Veblen introduced the theory of conspicuous consumption in which he proposed that the leisured classes showed their superiority over the working classes through extravagant and non-functional expenditure.³⁶ Veblen determined that it was the 'waste' in these actions that communicated superiority and reputability.^d

A century later, biologist Amotz Zahavi was looking at similar ideas. He wondered why peacocks have such extravagantly large and colorful tails when such displays are inefficient and evolution favours the efficient.³⁷ Zahavi wasn't the first person to think about this, back in 1860 Darwin had stated in a letter to a friend "the sight of a peacock's tail, makes me sick!", he couldn't understand why evolution would allow such a terrible inefficiency.³⁸

Zahavi discovered that the apparently wasteful peacock tail was actually a signal, the high cost of which ensured it's reliability. He proposed the "handicap principle": for signals to be reliable, they must be costly.³⁹ Animals had evolved costly signals to demonstrate their strength and status.⁴⁰ By displaying it's ability to thrive even with such a handicap, the animal reliably signals it's high quality.^e

The vital component of meaningful signalling is that it is expensive and/or difficult to do. The cost does not need to be financially expensive but it must be hard for competitors to imitate. The examples on the next page show how the idea of costly signalling is as true for marketing communications and brands as much as it is for animal communication:

^d Though Veblen is famous for the theory of conspicuous consumption, his own term was the law of conspicuous waste. Veblen, T. *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Oxford World's Classics), Originally 1899, 2009 edition

^e At around the same time that Zahavi was formulating the handicap principle to explain animal behaviour, Michael Spence and George Akerlof were developing signalling theory within economics to explain market phenomena, work that earned them both a Nobel Prize in 2001.

Figure 6 - Costly Signalling in Nature

“in order to be effective, signals have to be reliable, in order to be reliable, signals have to be costly”

Source: See references

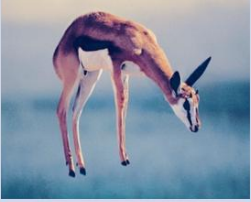









				
Gazelle Stotting	Toads Croaks	Super Territories	Bowerbirds	Hand Axes
Gazelles jump up and down when spotted by a wolf. The gazelle is signalling to the wolf that it has been seen; by jumping it wastes valuable time and energy thus sending a costly signal that it is able to outrun the wolf (it wouldn't waste the energy and time if it couldn't afford to).	A male toad mounts a female who is ready to lay. While on top the male croaks. The deeper the croak the stronger the toad. It is a costly signal as a deep croak is only possible if the toad holds the female very lightly. Weaker toads hold on too tight fearful of being knocked off meaning their croaks are high, signalling their weakness.	The size of an animals territory can serve as a signal of their strength. A large territory proves the males superiority and a better mate. The territory serves no purpose but to signal the strength of the male. Territories are costly as they take time and energy to maintain.	Bowerbirds build structures to attract females. The structures have no purpose beyond acting as a signal to females. The more elaborate and complicated the structure the stronger the signal. The signal is costly as the bird must waste time and effort to create the structure.	Early man had a preference for highly symmetric, carefully crafted stone hand axes. These axes did not have a practical use but acted as a signal to a mans strength and ability. To make one a man would need to have access to resources, fine motor skills and be able to sit and craft for hours and still survive.

Figure 7 - Costly Signalling in Branding

“in order to be effective, signals have to be reliable, in order to be reliable, signals have to be costly”

Source: See references

				
Waitrose Service	Honda Cog Ad	Bellagio Fountains	Goldman Lobby	Red Bull F1 Team
When you ask for the location of an item in Waitrose the member of staff will always ask “is there anything else I can do for you”. This additional question doesn't cost Waitrose from a financial perspective but it does from an energy point of view, it takes effort to train staff that well. It acts as a clear signal of Waitrose quality. Importantly no other supermarket does this .	There have been many examples of costly signalling through advertising. The Honda cog is selected as a good example as it is costly not only from a media and production perspective but also from a skill perspective, the ad contained minimal CGI and took 6 months to create. Creativity is as much a costly signal as finance as it is as hard if not harder to imitate.	The Bellagio Hotel in Las Vegas spent \$40m on dancing fountains. A clear and reliable signal about the hotel itself. The fountains have generated vast amounts of social signals for the Bellagio. Appearing in 9 blockbuster films in the last 10 years and are taken home to millions of friends and family on photos and video. Each time these are viewed the association between the Bellagio and luxury is strengthened in a more reliable way than any message could ever achieve.	Many banks have oversized lobbies containing art to signal their wealth. At the Goldman Sachs global headquarters in New York the expansive lobby is home to a mural costing \$10m, wasting so much expensive real estate and money is a clear signal of the banks wealth and power.	Red Bull signals its association with adrenaline not by sponsoring but by owning an F1 team which have won the last two F1 championships. The expense of F1 teams is well known, the Red Bull team is believed to have cost \$400m over 3 years. However from a signal perspective it demonstrates Red Bulls values more clearly than any message could and creates millions of social signals about the brand through F1 news reports and discussions.

2. Intention - Unintended Communications

Unintended, unconscious signals people create are more powerful than planned conscious communication precisely because they are unplanned and therefore can be seen as more honest.^{41 f}

Paul Watzlawick stated that “every communication has content and a relationship aspect such that the later classifies the former and is therefore a meta-communication”.⁴² In other words, the communication is what is said, but that communication is qualified and adapted by the tone and body language of the person communicating, and this is what he terms ‘meta-communication’. Watzlawick found that it was the meta-communication and not the communication which dominated human communication.⁴³

Well known work by Albert Mehrabian has further evidenced this demonstrating that non-verbal communication and tone of voice are more influential than words.⁴⁴ If words disagree with the nonverbal behaviour, people tend to believe the nonverbal behaviour.

The same is true with brands and people. Any action or even non-action by a brand contains implicit signals which are more likely to be taken as truth than the words that compose a message because they are perceived as unplanned and organic. They can be seen as proof points for the brand^g, therefore “in marketing, meta-communication is what really matters.”⁴⁵

This has large ramifications for brands, how they behave and how they communicate. Everything communicates and it is those actions which are perceived as not having been planned as communication which can have the strongest effect. Detail suddenly becomes much more important.

So apparent is the power of unplanned communication that organisations monitor it (e.g. the ASA) and people complain when communication is made out to be unplanned when it is planned. In June this year the ASA banned a Nike Twitter campaign which had used the brand’s sponsored stars to tweet about the latest Nike campaign without clearly labelling the

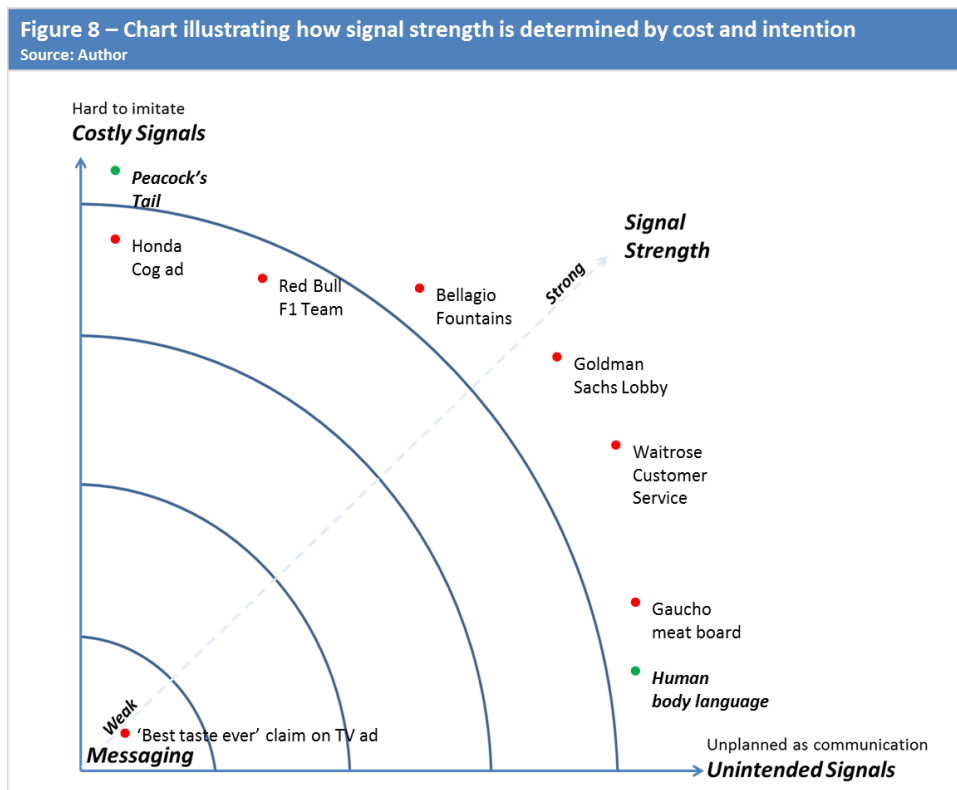
^f Joseph Stalin was aware of the power of *perceived* unintended communication. When meeting with his most senior generals in a marble floored room Stalin would wear shoes with a velvet sole meaning his footsteps made no noise, while all the other generals clonked about in their heavy shoes.

^g Many brands don’t understand this. In the Evening Standard (11th July 2012) Paul Moody CEO of Britvic said of a £25m recall of Britvic Fruit Shoots “it’s important for the consumer to understand, it is a package-cap issue and is not a product issue and not a brand issue”. Unfortunately people don’t make these distinctions; everything the company and product does is a brand issue and will be treated as such in the consumers mind.

tweet as an ad.^{46 h} The action taken by the ASA clearly illustrates the importance society attaches to defining the difference between planned and unplanned signals.ⁱ

What this means for brand communications

Signalling theory teaches us that for brands to use their implicit communications effectively they have to appear wasteful and / or unintentional. The below chart illustrates how signal strength is determined by these two factors (with examples added for understanding). The further to the right the brand behaviour, the more powerful it is as a signal. As the chart details ‘messaging’ is intentional and easy to imitate and therefore a weak signal (sitting in the bottom left corner).



^h The idea of faking unplanned communications is not new. In 1735 Benjamin Franklin sent anonymous letters to his local paper (The Pennsylvania Gazette) in support of his proposal for the first fire service to be created. Source: The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, 1793

ⁱ Technology will make this issue more prominent. Bots already create 24% of tweets and 22 of the 30 most prolific Wikipedia editors are bots. The practice of digital ‘astroturfing’ is thought to be increasing quickly as bots do the work of organisations and brands. Source: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/mar/30/how-bots-are-taking-over-the-world>

Figure 9 – Chart illustrating that costly / unintended signals have greater sociability
Source: Author

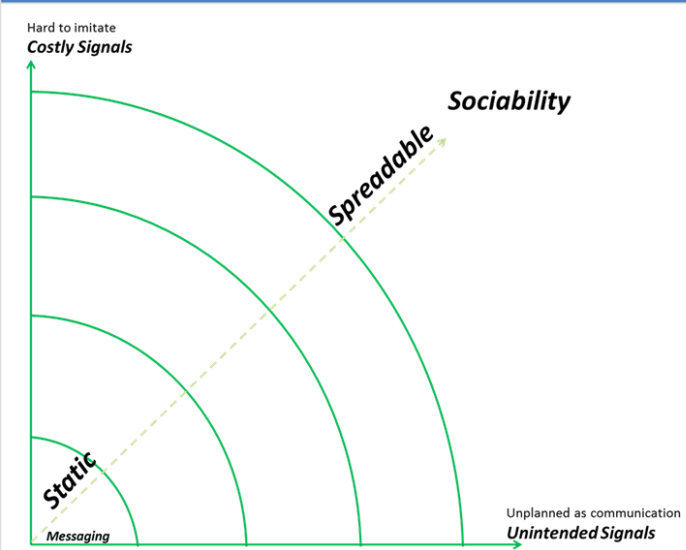
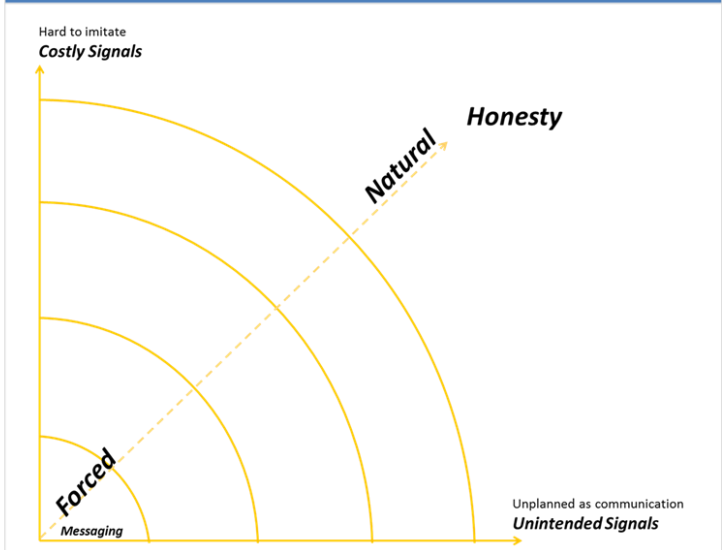


Figure 10 – Chart illustrating that costly / unintended signals are perceived as more natural
Source: Author



It is interesting to consider that brand behaviours on the outer edge of the chart shall not only create stronger signals but also be seen as more honest and are more likely to generate social signals.

The chart suggests that many brands have misunderstood what engagement means. The strongest signals are those which are unintended and costly as these signals are unquestioned. Being implicit these signals require the consumer to join up the dots and it is this joining of the dots (whether unconscious or conscious) which can be seen as real engagement.

Many brands currently count encouraging people to upload their photo on to Facebook for the chance to win a prize as engagement. The chart disputes this idea with this type of campaign sitting firmly in the bottom left - being easy to imitate and clearly intended as communication from the brand.^j

^j Paul Adam (Global Head of Brand Design, Facebook) recently wrote on his blog “marketers are building web apps. Ads that you can interact with. Ads with multiple layers of interaction. Everyone is building these “immersive” experiences. Almost every app built for a brand on Facebook has practically no usage. Heavy, ‘immersive’ experiences are not how people engage and interact with brands. Pitched against strategies built around many, lightweight interactions over time, heavyweight experiences will fail because they don’t map to real life.” Source: <http://www.thinkoutsidein.com/blog/2012/03/many-lightweight-interactions-over-time>

Stage 4: Signal Brands

"The best ads don't look like ads"

Amir Kassaei, CCO DDB^{A7}

Blurring the lines – Signal Brands

Brands which understand the importance of implicit communication ensure all their signals amplify the brand's values and have such belief in the brand that they are willing to create costly signals. These brands can be labelled Signal Brands.

Every action by these brands is designed to signal the brand's positioning as conspicuously as possible, they communicate directly with System 1 rather than relying on persuading System 2. This type of brand behaviour is only possible due to these brands changing the process by which brands are built.

Signal Brands blur the lines between product, marketing, social and culture. Traditionally, a product was developed then a marketing plan (potentially with a social element) would be added on top and forced on culture by targeting an audience.

The Signal Brand approach is different.

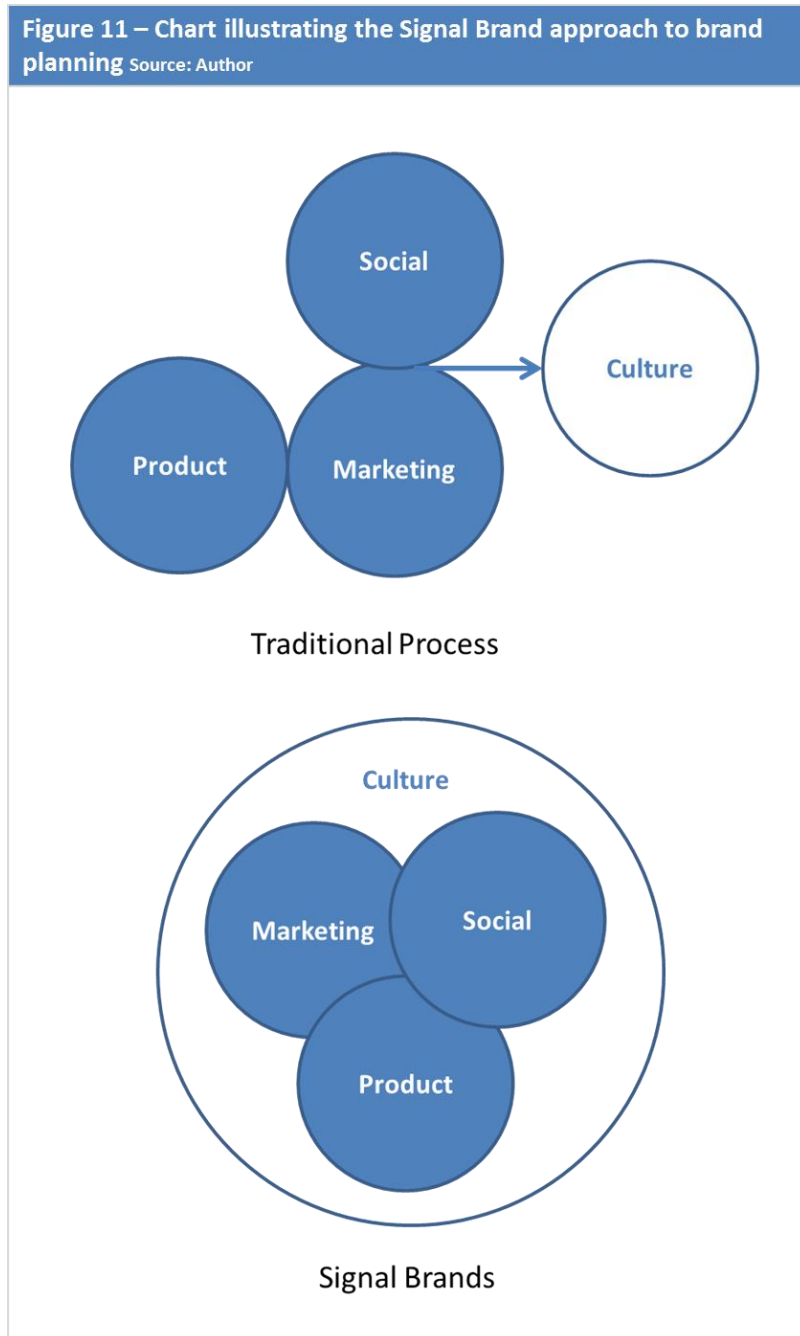
The product is created with the marketing and social elements built in: embedded into the product.^{k,l} By its very design it tells the positioning story of the brand and encourages others to tell stories about it.

Signal Brands embed the product into culture; they do not force marketing campaigns on targets, they appeal to people and become part of their lives.

^k In the 2008 book 'Baked In' Alex Bogusky and John Winsor explain the benefits of products with the marketing embedded.

^l Research by New York University Stern School Of Business has shown that products with social embedded are more effective than those with it added on. Aral, S and Walker D. Vision Statement: Forget Viral Marketing—Make the Product Itself Viral. Harvard Business Review, June 2011

The below diagram visualises the difference in approach of the traditional process vs. Signal Brands:



Stage 5: Four principles of Signal Brands

This change of marketing structure is founded on four principles which Signal Brands adhere to. These principles encourage the creation of indisputable signals about the brand.

Four principles of Signal Brands:

1. Act extravagantly
 2. Sacrifice more
 3. Distinctive design
 4. Concrete actions
- } Drive costly communication
- } Drive unintentional communication

Principle #1: Act Extravagantly

“Brands should be spending less on communicating and more on conspicuous waste.”

Professor Tim Ambler, London Business School⁴⁸

Extravagance is the last thing many brands want, especially with the growing importance of procurement and the on-going economic issues. But accountants aren't likely to think about the implicit communication of a brand and need marketing agencies to illustrate the benefits. Signalling theory gives such actions a much stronger rationale. Being extravagant and wasteful can improve the reliability of communication making a brand's powerful implicit communication more effective.

Studies have shown that high levels of advertising spend communicates quality implicitly through the mere fact of spending (wasting) so much money.⁴⁹ Creativity can also be seen as a type of extravagance, in advertising the creativity is waste as it is beyond the functional communication purpose of the ad. The more wasteful you can be from a creative perspective the better from a business perspective. Analysis of data from both the IPA Databank and the Gunn Report found that creatively awarded campaigns grew market share 11 times more efficiently than non-awarded campaigns.⁵⁰

Extravagance can also be displayed by other brand behaviour. Many Nordstrom department stores in the USA have a pianist playing a grand piano on the ground floor, a clear signal about the brand. While relatively low cost, this can be seen as extravagant as no other department store chain has pianists.^m

As social media grows and media personalisation increases it is going to become necessary for all brands to find ways to act more extravagantly to create stronger positive associations about the brand.

^m In April 2011 the LA Times reported that Nordstrom were planning to remove pianists from some of their stores. The proposal created outcry with many commenters pointing out the potential negative effects on the Nordstrom brand of removing such a distinctive and extravagant signal.

Application – Häagen Dazs

When launched Häagen Dazs was a prime example of a Signal Brand, with unique packaging, a premium price and highly creative advertising driving strong brand and financial results⁵¹. However, as John Hegarty has stated “sadly, over time a succession of brand owners dragged it back to the sector. Now it’s just one of a number of ice-creams fighting for attention in that supermarket chiller cabinet.”⁵² One way Häagen Dazs can move back towards being a Signal Brand is to act more extravagantly.

How could Häagen Dazs benefit from being more extravagant?

Due to the quality of the ingredients Häagen Dazs ice cream is supposed to be kept in colder conditions than standard freezers can manage. Häagen Dazs could roll out their own extra cold freezers moving the brand out of the standard supermarket freezers and into their own special environment. To add to the extravagance the freezers would be designed exclusively by Smeg and not include any visibility of the ice cream from outside (see image below). The cost attached to this extravagant act would help send a signal that Häagen Dazs was once again no longer just another ice cream.

Figure 12 – Image of extra cold Häagen Dazs Smeg freezer



Principle #2: Sacrifice More

"Elegance is refusal."

Coco Chanel

Costly signals can also be created by 'sacrificial' brand actions. Sacrifice may have negative connotations but used well can be vital in strengthening a brand. Sacrificing sales or distribution in the name of the brand can send strong and effective signals about the brand but the current economic climate can mean this principle is often overlooked.

Luxury brands are especially good at sending these types of signals. The champagne brand Krug increased its price from \$19 to \$100 over the period of 10 years to boost the brand profile and compete with Dom Pérignon (which had entered the market at a higher price point). The strong implicit communication created by the higher price point meant Krug lost 'bad customers' (negative social signals), gained many more attractive ones (positive social signals) and significantly grew market share.⁵³

Consumer exclusion isn't just the realm of luxury brands; when GHD launched it was the only hair straightener on the market available solely through salons, instantly signalling the quality of the product.⁵⁴ Moleskine notepads grew distribution through bookstores and design shops, not stationary stores, helping to frame the brand as something separate from other notepads.

Many brands actively shy away from this type of sacrifice and weaken their brand by sending the wrong signals as a result.⁵⁵ Thornton's chocolates advertised in the window of Poundland may not be consciously remembered by a shopper but the next time they are looking for a gift the Thornton's Continental selection box will feel that little bit less appealing.

Consumers make no distinction between purposeful 'brand communication' and any other encounter they have with the brand, all affect their feelings towards the brand and all will alter the saleability of the brand.⁵⁶ Faced with ever increasing choice the detail becomes increasingly important as people, consciously or not, look for reasons to reject brands.⁵⁷

Application – Nescafe Azera

In 2012 Nescafe launched a new instant coffee called Nescafe Azera designed to taste like luxurious barista style coffee. The explicit communication said all the right things about its taste, but apart from the metallic packaging, the implicit communication of the brand did not align. The product was given vast distribution into all the major supermarkets, signalling that in reality it was just another instant coffee, in some shops a handy pack was even positioned in the snack aisle next to the Wispas and Cadburys Caramel, hardly luxurious.

How could Nescafe Azera benefit from sacrificing more?

What if Azera had sacrificed to send clearer signals about the brand and considered its implicit communications? What if they had created the product jointly with a group of independent coffee shops? What if they had launched exclusively through coffee shops and only slowly moved on to larger upmarket supermarkets once the brand and the right associations were established?

Figure 13 – Image of Nescafe Azera tin



Figure 14 – Image of Nescafe Azera next to confectionary products



Principle #3: Distinctive Design

“Design is an opportunity to continue telling the story, not just to sum everything up.”

Tate Linden⁵⁸

With the increasing importance of product placement and earned media, there is a need for brands to start seeing design as a central part of their marketing communications. A recent study by Millward Brown showed that distinctively designed brands have a 23% higher average potential to grow than those that don't.⁵⁹

An obvious example is the iPod white headphones. More interestingly, in 1916 Coca-Cola intentionally created a bottle (to quote the brief) “a person could recognize even if they felt it in the dark, and so shaped that, even if broken, a person could tell at a glance what it was.”⁶⁰

Distinctive design means a brand gets noticed (unconsciously or consciously) when it is encountered. There are many examples from fashion brands - the red heels of Louboutin shoes, the green and red stripe of Gucci, the oval metal plate on all Mulberry bags, all examples of distinctive design which allow the brand to conspicuously communicate implicitly.

In order to drive distinctive design, marketing needs to be involved much further up the production chain as it can affect the very nature of the product. The distinctive design of Beats By Dr Dre headphones means they are easily recognised when encountered, allowing the brand to grow through a strategy focused around product placement in music videos and celebrity use. These social signals have boosted Beats' appeal to the point where in 2011 Beats accounted for 53% of all headphone sales in the USA.⁶¹

Even utility brands can become more visible through distinctive design; energy provider Npower employees now roll out a red carpet at any home they visit to ensure they do not mark the carpet, a clear visible signal about the care the brand takes when in customers' homes⁶².



All brands must start to think about how visually appealing their product is for entertainment producers; supposedly Apple don't pay for product placement yet they appeared in 40% of the films which topped the US box office last year.⁶³ The distinctive design of their products makes them an easy choice.ⁿ Even with the new opportunity of digitally inserting a brand into a TV show the producer still holds a veto and will undoubtedly fight against brands which don't look good.^o

Application – Chrome Netbooks

Google launched the next generation Chrome netbooks earlier this year. But it's unlikely you'll notice them in a coffee shop or on a TV programme. Whilst the Chrome logo is present on the back of the notebook it is small and the design looks like any other laptop.

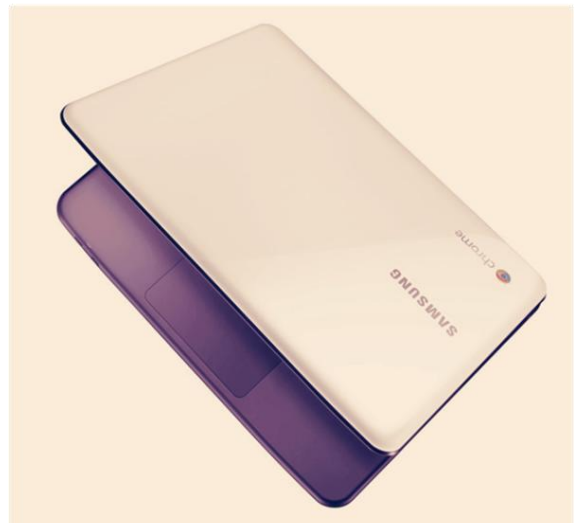
How could Chrome Netbooks benefit from distinctive design?

Google should have worked with their partners to create a distinctive design to signal its use. Millions of dollars' worth of exposure has been lost because the shell of the laptop is dull and indistinctive.

Figure 16 – Image illustrating the extent of Apple product placement



Figure 17 – Image of Google Chrome netbook lid



ⁿ In the 1990s Apple's PowerBook laptops included a company logo on the lid that faced the user. When the lid was opened, the logo was upside down. This was inconvenient to producers and made them less likely to use Apple products as props. When Steve Jobs returned from his absence he decided to flip the logo round making the product easily identifiable and more attractive to producers. Source: reference #62

^o To investigate further I interviewed Paul Milsom at MirriAd. MirriAd are a product placement company who digitally insert products into programmes. Paul described how even with digital insertion producers are concerned about the aesthetics of the product and stature of the brand and will fight to keep indistinctive products out.

Principle #4: Concrete Actions

"Some less friendly observers have said we will abandon our principles and reveal ourselves as shallow cynical exploiters. We must disappoint them... quite simply put, we walk our talk."

Gordon Roddick, Co-founder of the Body Shop⁶⁴

To appear 'unintended' marketing needs to be embedded into every part of the company not just a bolt on. Every encounter needs to visibly reflect the brand's values. Unintended communication can be seen as any action by the brand which does not have communication as its primary function. As transparency becomes more important brands must ensure that every encounter reflects the brand's values and that those values are clearly demonstrated through clearly visible actions.

At Cannes 2012 Nike & R/GA won the Titanium Grand Prix for Nike Fuel. Speaking about the new product Stefan Olander (Nike VP Digital Sport) said "the products and services are becoming the marketing. Nike+ Running started off as a marketing idea. It is not marketing anymore. This is now how we run our business."⁶⁵

The marketing and product merging has meant the Nike brand values are concreted into the brands behaviour. It's important to remember that the real value of this innovation is more what it implicitly communicates about the brand than actual consumer participation. For example Nike+ has a membership of 2m globally (vs. 46m joggers in the US alone), a relatively low penetration but the real value is its effect on Nike's running credentials and brand salience.⁶⁶

Concrete actions include ensuring every last detail aligns with the brand positioning.^p At a Gaucho restaurant the waiter brings a selection of raw steaks for inspection and talks through the differences illustrating the expertise of the staff and the quality of the meat. This drives social signals reaffirming the right associations with the Gaucho brand. Nearly every consumer review of Gaucho mentions this concrete piece of theatre.

^p Renny Gleeson (W+K Global Director of Interactive Strategy) recently showed in a TED talk that even a well-designed 404 error message (no page detected) on the web can improve feelings about a brand. Summed up by the statement: "Little things, done right, matter. Well-designed moments build brands". Source: http://www.ted.com/talks/renny_gleeson_404_the_story_of_a_page_not_found.html

The majority of brands miss these opportunities or never develop them. They presume that as the primary function of these actions is other than brand communication then they have no real brand effect. This results in substantial sums of money, which could have reinforced brand values, being at best under-utilised and at worst counter-productive.⁶⁷

Application – Specsavers

Specsavers is a highly successful optician chain looking for further growth. Tracking shows that one of their issues is many non-users (45+) see it simply as somewhere to buy cheap glasses and lack trust in the brand. Current activity focuses on running ads about a new piece of Specsavers technology across a number of highly trusted media channels (quality newspapers and radio).

How could Specsavers act in a more concrete way?

Specsavers know that once a non-user has an eye test with them their perceptions of care and trust alter for the better. If these people won't go to the store Specsavers should attempt to bring the store to them but in the guise of a trustworthy brand. Specsavers could collaborate with Marks & Spencer (a well trusted brand to this audience) to create 'Marks & Spencer Opticians brought to you by Specsavers' added into their 100 largest stores. This allows Specsavers to implicitly borrow trust from the Marks & Spencer brand (and adds further reach to their service).

Figure 18 – Image of Gaucho meat board



Figure 19 – Image of Marks & Spencer's store



Stage 6: Building a Signal Brand

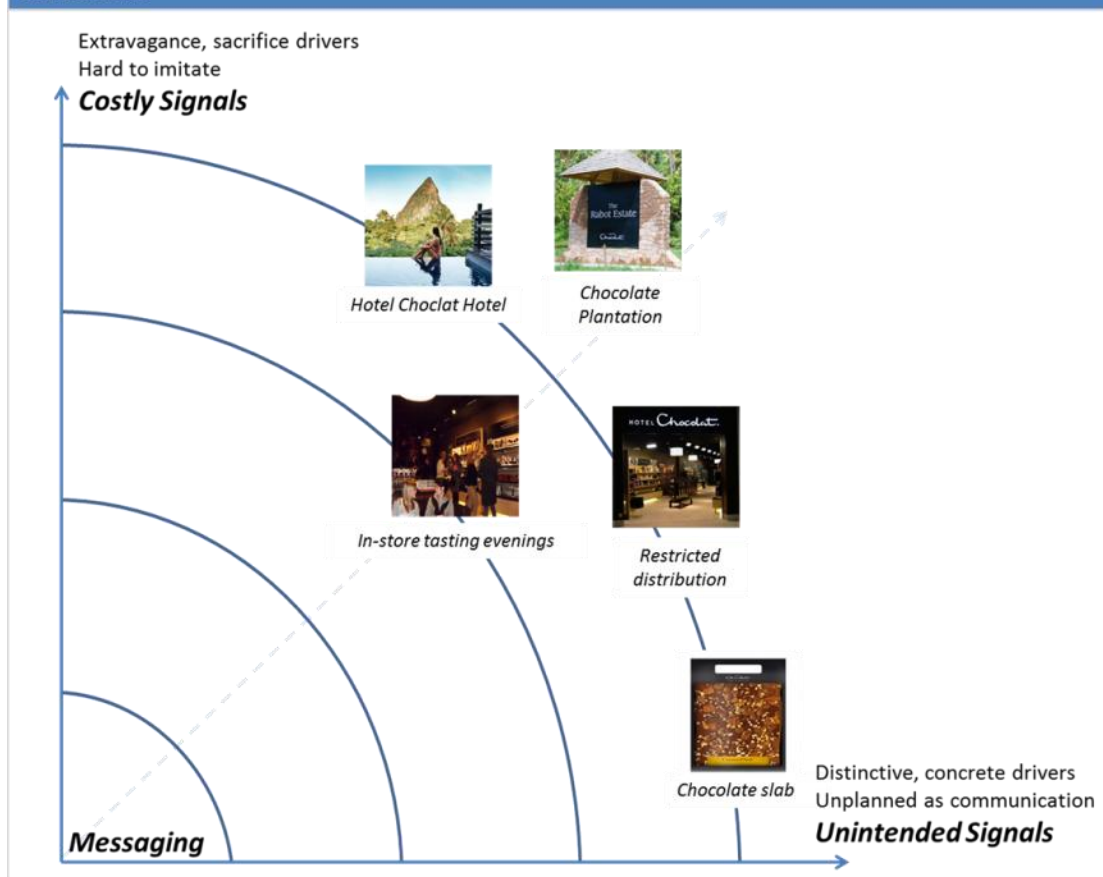
Two Case Studies of Signal Brands

Hotel Chocolat

While Thorntons run constant promotions, further widen distribution and fight off the administrators,⁶⁸ Hotel Chocolat goes from strength to strength by restricting distribution, selling at a premium price and designing distinctive products (it invented the chocolate slab). All ensure its actions send out strong conspicuous signals about the brand's quality and authenticity.⁶⁹ The brand recently opened its own 5 star hotel in St Lucia next to its own chocolate plantation (the only brand in the UK to have one), an act of extravagance and a clear signal that the brand is seriously committed to creating the best quality chocolate.

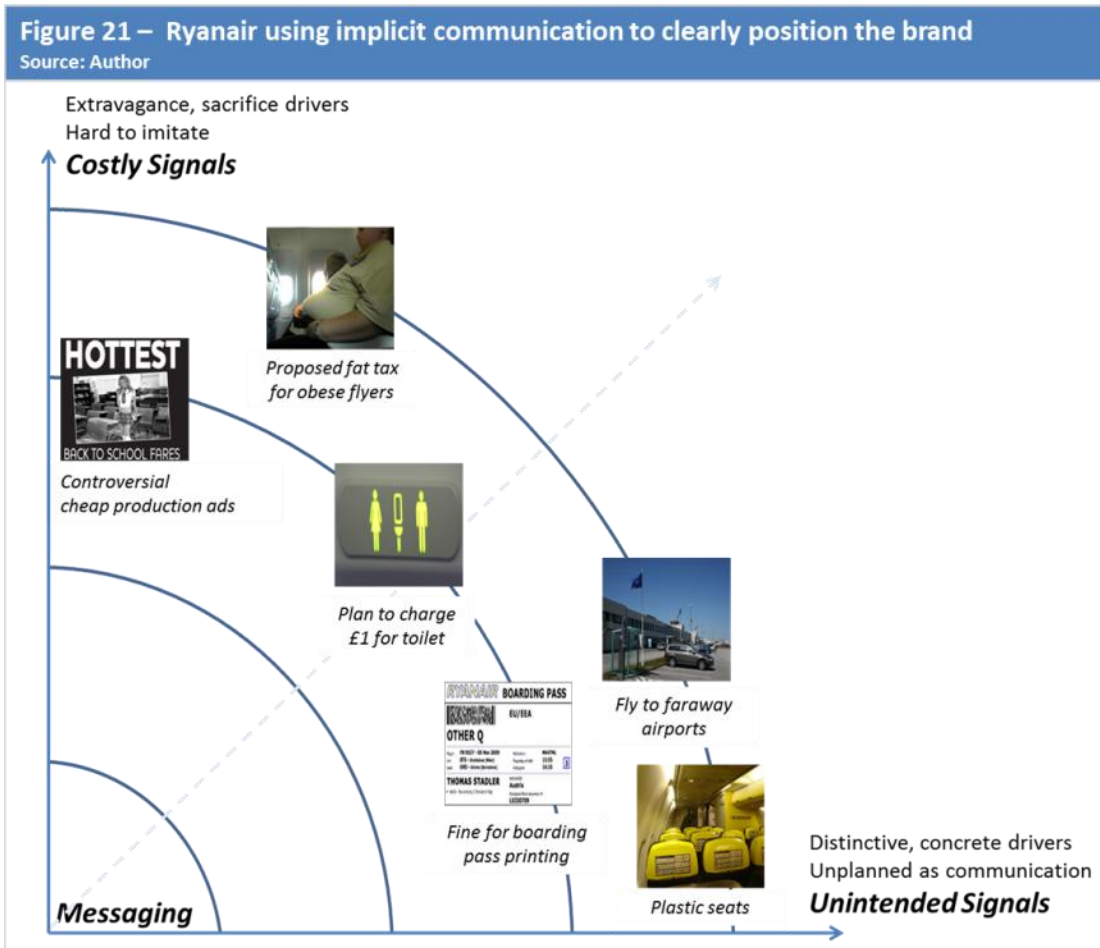
Figure 20 – Hotel Chocolat creating indisputable signals to build the brand

Source: Author



Ryanair

Ryanair is now the largest airline in Europe carrying more people on more routes than any other brand.⁷⁰ The airline's clear brand values entirely saturate the brand's behaviour: Every implicit communication signals 'no-frills' and 'cheap'. Many of Ryanair's signals are costly in that they are hard to imitate, no other airline would dare to propose a fat tax on flyers or run such obviously cheap production press ads. Social signals are often driven by outrageous claims about future initiatives or outlandish outbursts by the CEO Michael O'Leary.



Creating a Signal Brand #1

The Co-operative: from convenience store to Signal Brand

As aforementioned, the Co-operative has numerous strong brand values but does not exploit them effectively. In the store it is hard to feel any of the unique aspects of the brand. Signal Brands emit their brand positioning through every pore. Below details how the Co-Op could use the principles of Signal Brands to further exploit their implicit signals:

Figure 22 – Moving the Co-Operative from convenience store to Signal Brand
Source: Author

Signal Brand Principle	New Behaviour	Signal created
Act extravagantly	Add highly visible renewable energy sources to every convenience store. All stores will have either wind turbines or solar panels visible on the store.	Highly environmentally friendly brand
Sacrifice more	Sacrifice shelf space to allow room for produce from around the local area to be sold.	Actively help local businesses
Concrete actions	For each convenience store publish a cook book full of recipe ideas from the local area, profits of which go to local community projects.	Interested and passionate about the local community
Concrete actions	Allow store space to be used after hours for small community groups	Interested and passionate about the local community
Concrete actions	Product display include local labelling with community member recommendations including photographs “Heinz Baked Beans. I love these on toast, Jane Singer, Tooting” and local facts “Tooting’s favourite bread”	Interested in the local community
Concrete actions	Bag up vegetable and fruit waste and allow children to take away for free as pet food.	Environmentally friendly and interested in local community
Distinctive design	Each store named by its location first then the co-operative e.g. Tooting Co-operative, Brixton Co-operative. Also add location name to carrier bags.	Interested and passionate about the local community
Distinctive design	Partner with food manufacturers to create location specific labels for food e.g. Heinz Tooting Beans	Interested and passionate about the local community

Figure 23 – Image of a Co-Operative store. The brand needs to signal its values conspicuously even to those who don't come in store.



Figure 24 – Image of The People's Supermarket Cookbook. The People's Supermarket in London has created a cookbook designed and populated by the people who shop in the store.




Creating a Signal Brand #2

Fanta – Fizzy orange to Signal Brand

Below illustrates how Fanta could act more like a Signal Brand. As a Signal Brand Fanta would have ‘creativity’ and ‘imagination’ at its core reflecting its heritage.⁹ Every action would reflect those values, resulting in Fanta being embedded into the creativity landscape and becoming synonymous with that culture:

Figure 25 – Moving Fanta from fizzy orange to Signal Brand
Source: Author

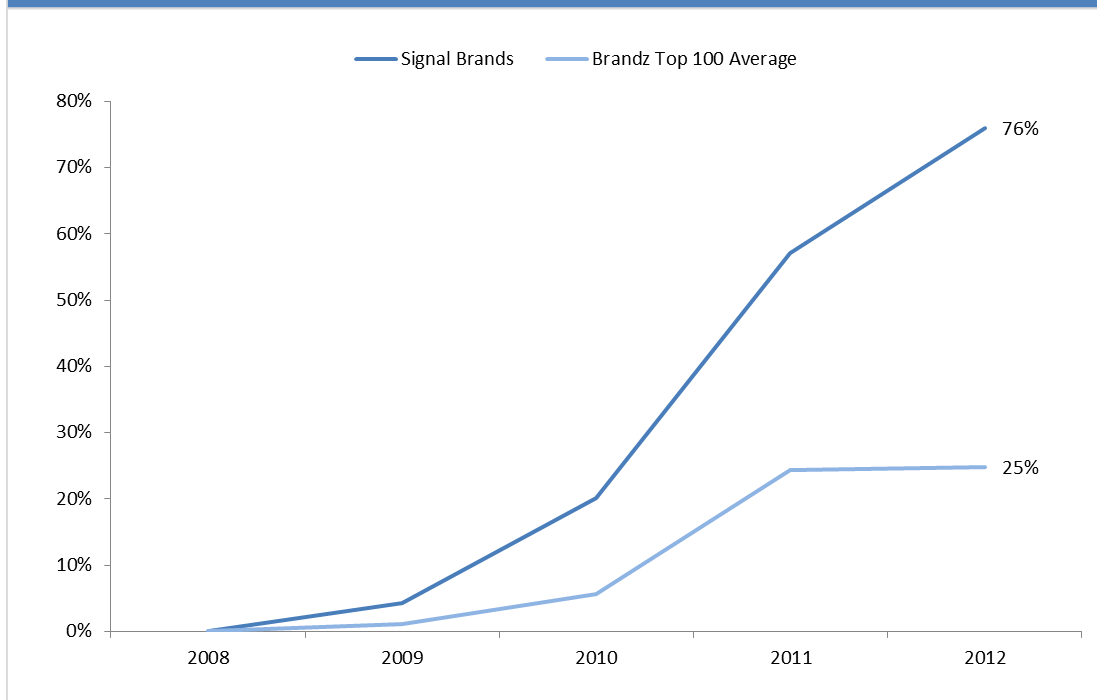
Current Behaviour	Signal Brand Principle	New Behaviour	Original Fanta Bottle
Standard cans and plastic bottles	Distinctive design / Sacrifice more	Replace cans and plastic bottles with original ribbed glass bottle designed by world famous industrial designer Raymond Lowe in the 1950s. Make the glass bottle core of distribution.	
Distributed through all possible retail outlets	Sacrifice more	Curtail mass distribution and focus on key ‘imagination’ hubs. Gain distribution in Apple stores, Google offices, key creative universities, coffee shops. Creative people work on Apple products, write in Moleskine pads and drink Fanta.	
Currently sell limited number of flavours	Act extravagantly	Worldwide Fanta has over 100 flavours. Create a vending machine which creates custom Fanta flavours using up to 6 of the 100, giving millions of combinations. Place in ‘imagination hubs’ and cool bars as an endless mixer of drinks.	
Creation by Fanta is limited to TV ads, a Facebook game and competitions	Concrete actions / Act extravagantly	Build the Fanta Imagination Centre in Berlin for top creative students worldwide to study at. An institution dedicated to the creative arts and imagination. Use output from centre for Fanta ads and content.	
Usually found in a Coca-Cola branded vending machine giving impression of secondary brand	Distinctive design	Stock Fanta in its own vending machine outside retail containing the glass bottle and featuring bottle opener. Vending machine to be based on original Fanta fridge design from 1950s.	
Brand rarely seen outside own content and advertising	Distinctive design	Product placement of original glass bottle in creative industry based US TV programmes e.g. Mad Men.	

⁹ Fanta originated due to difficulties importing Coca-Cola syrup into Nazi Germany. Coca-Cola was forced to create a new product for the German market, using only ingredients available at the time, the “leftovers of leftovers”. The name was the result of a brainstorming session, the team were told to “use their imaginations” (“fantasie” in German), to which one retorted “Fanta!” Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fanta>

Signal Brands Are More Valuable

The shift of focus on to implicit communication is not just an interesting take on brand communications; it offers brands a real business and financial advantage. Brandz data shows that Signal Brands (those brands which exploit their implicit communications effectively) have grown their value at more than twice the speed of average growth seen by the Brandz Top 100 over the last 5 years.^{71r} The data provides undeniable evidence of the opportunities available to brands from exploiting their implicit communications effectively.

Figure 26 – Graph showing Signal Brand value growth vs. Brandz Top 100 average
Source: Author amended Brandz data



^r Methodology – used Brandz 2008 – 2012 data. Created a group of Signal Brands which consisted of Google, Apple, Red Bull, Nike, Starbucks, Hermes, Louis Vuitton. Brands in the group are from a cross section of sectors and feature a wide range of sizes. This group's growth was then compared to the performance of the top 100 average over the last 5 years.

Stage 7: Significant implications for how we work

Implications for marketing

"It becomes increasingly clear that real marketing cannot be thought of as a department activity. It is a matter of harnessing all the company's resources."

Stephen King⁷²

Many brands will find it difficult to adhere to the Signal Brand principles discussed, principally because marketing in their business will not enjoy the stature or reach needed to influence product development or act in an extravagant or sacrificial way.

In order for companies to build Signal Brands it will require them to rethink what marketing is and how it fits into the corporate structure. Often the brand is still viewed as the province of the marketing department and the basis for advertising and communication.⁷³ This is not a new issue, Stephen King highlighted the need to move on from what he termed 'marketing department marketing' back in 1985.⁷⁴

If brands are to exploit their implicit communications effectively there is a need to realign marketing in the corporate structure. All departments need to become 'brand ambassadors' and all decisions need to go through a brand filter. Marketing needs to be involved at the start of product development. The process of passing a product to marketing to be sold does not fit with Signal Brand thinking. Approaches such as semiotics need to be used by marketing to ensure any product developed communicates the right signals about the brand.⁷⁵

Without these changes managing brand signals becomes a game of roulette as different departments make disparate decisions often resulting in opportunities to build the brand being wasted.

Implications for advertising

The importance of implicit communications has implications for how brands use advertising. As discussed, the weight, format and creativity of an ad all send signals about the brand. Considering the importance of implicit communication, brands can use advertising more effectively in two ways:

1. Focus on the emotions

Focus on the implicit not the explicit message in the advertising. Emotionally engaging ads produce the best results for brands as has been proven by analysis of IPA case studies.⁷⁶ A few years ago Philips ran a TV ad for a shaver that was the complete opposite of the usual approach.⁷⁷ The ad had no voice-over, no product information, and no rational message; instead the creative was a sensual sci-fi fantasy. The ad performed badly against tracking but sales increased significantly, with share doubling in six months.⁷⁸ Obviously there are times when messages and explicit communication will be required but all the evidence states advertising if possible should be emotionally focused using implicit rather than explicit communication.

Figure 27 – Images of Philips Moisturizing Shaving System TV ad

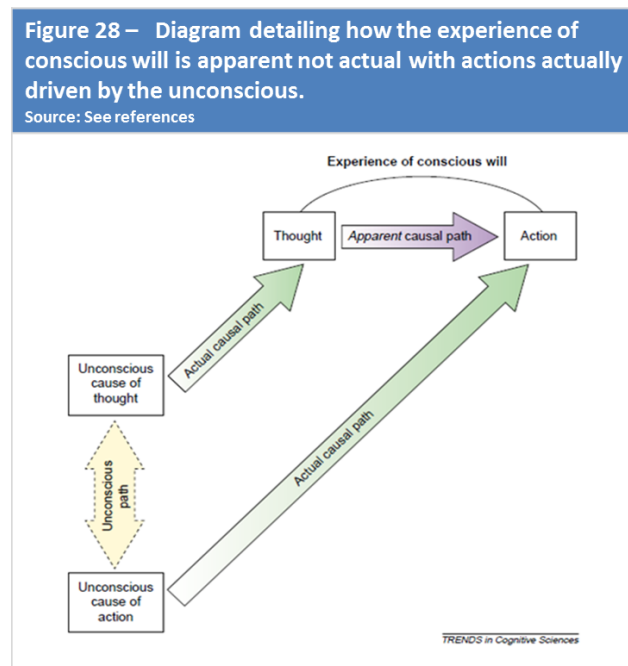


2. Amplify brand behaviour

Advertising can be used to amplify brand behaviour which speaks implicitly about the brand. Starbucks did this recently - advertising about their new initiative to write the customer's name on every cup. Red Bull often advertise their many adrenaline focused events; Virgin Atlantic have ran ads amplifying the fact they serve ice cream and give massages (implicit proof points of the brand's ambition to make flying more fun.) Importantly, any brand behaviour amplified must be honest in that the behaviour cannot look contrived or persuasion-based, it must appear naturally part of the brand.

Implications for evaluation – people are unreliable witnesses

System 1 thinking and implicit communication by its nature is hard to evaluate as it is processed by the unconscious and therefore cannot be asked evaluative questions directly. Even when people feel they are acting rationally and have made a conscious decision this may not be the case. The unconscious makes most decisions with the conscious post-rationalising the decision and creating the feeling of conscious will.^{79s} This process has been called the ‘meta-cognitive error’ shown in the diagram below.⁸⁰

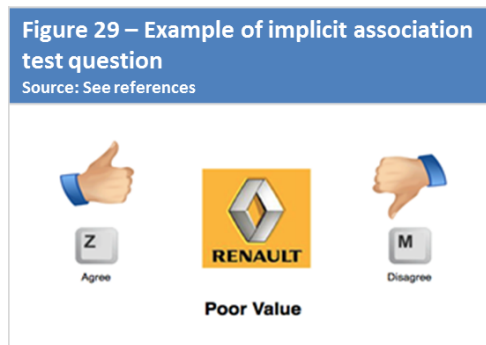


Understanding that people post-rationalise means the method of asking people questions can be misleading for evaluation. Numerous papers and single source studies have shown a clear disconnect between stated opinions and actual behaviour.^{81 82} The very nature of this type of questioning creates conditions for System 2 responses when brands are shaped by System 1.

However, traditional research methods are still important as conscious awareness can have a proven effect on business performance. As opposed to **replacing** these measures we should **add to** them to give a more balanced scorecard of metrics.⁸³

⁵ As the father of behavioural research Ernst Dichter stated in his classic book 'Strategy of Desire' "you would be amazed to find how often we mislead ourselves, regardless of how smart we think we are, when we attempt to explain why we are behaving the way we do,"

The Implicit Association Test (IAT) allows us to measure the strength of automatic associations between objects in memory by making the respondent answer at speed and therefore allowing us to bypass the conscious rationalising mind.⁸⁴ IAT can measure feelings towards important attributes such as brand associations, perceived quality and preference (all of which have been shown to have an impact on brand growth).^{85 86}

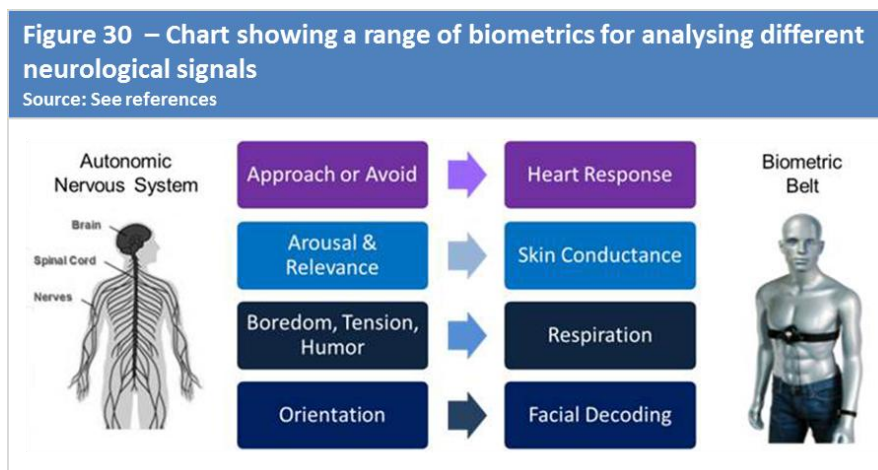


Studying behaviour directly by analysing signals

We can also evaluate brand performance by identifying and analysing signals which allow us to study behaviour directly. These signals can be neurological or digital:

Neurological signals

A range of biometrics can now be used to understand feelings and emotions: skin conductance, facial decoding, heart response and respiration.⁸⁷ These approaches analyse unconscious signals the body creates to understand the feelings towards a brand or its communication while avoiding engaging the often unreliable conscious mind.



Digital signals

Digital signals are becoming more important to brands and a vital part of a brand's implicit communications.⁸⁸ Social monitoring tools offer us a great opportunity to understand how the brand is perceived by people, the level of momentum the brand has and what people are saying about the brand. Crucially, unlike traditional quantitative or qualitative research the signals picked up from social media are often not considered and in the case of Twitter can reflect an almost unconscious commentary on someone's day.

Signals from search usage can also shed light on brand associations and patterns of behaviour.^t Adding this type of analysis is useful as it allows brands to track what is happening now as opposed to surveys which often have considerable time lags.

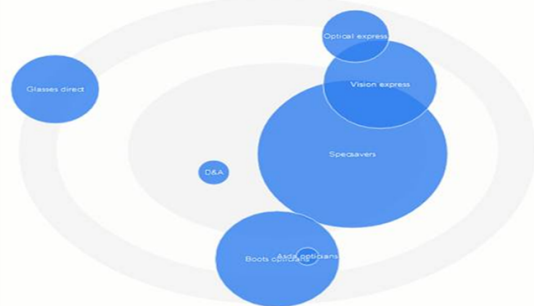
Figure 31 – Output from social media monitoring tool. Size of word, proximity and thickness of link illustrates words associated with the brand and volume of mentions. This data can be used to understand brand perception and momentum.

Source: See references



Figure 32 – Output from search analysis tool which shows the volume of search (size of bubble) and the frequency the brands are searched for in the same session (proximity of the bubbles). This data can be used to give an indication of brand saliency and consideration sets.

Source: See references



^t Other sectors are starting to analyse digital signals to provide insights: last year the Bank of England started to use search data to shed light on economic trends and illustrated a correlation between searches for 'estate agents' and house prices. McLaren, N. Using internet search data as economic indicators. Bank Of England Quarterly Bulletin 2011 Q2. Source: <http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/publications/Documents/quarterlybulletin/qb110206.pdf>

Changing how we plan

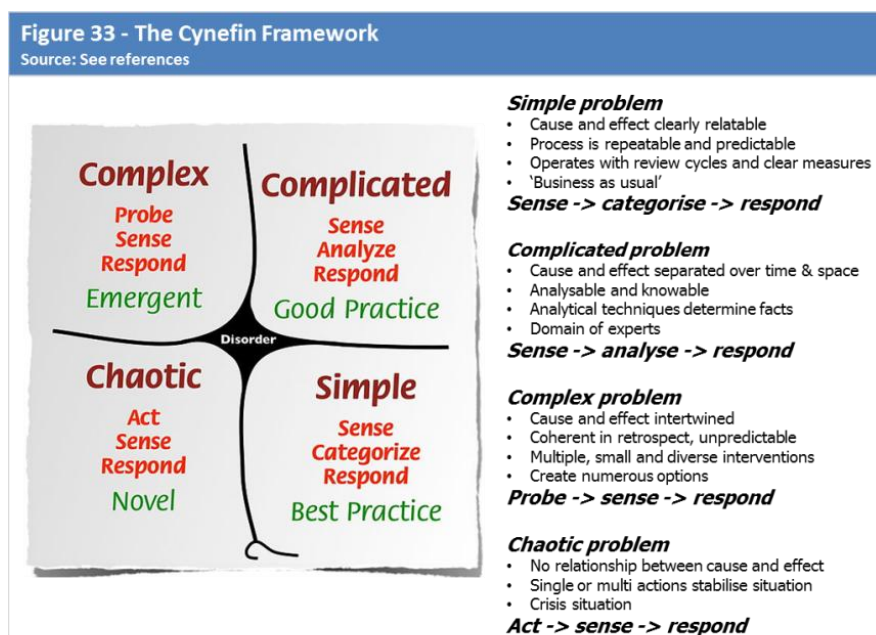
“The data which is marketing’s raw material will always be dodgy, consumers will always be irrational, cause and effect will always be partly impenetrable.”

Stephen King⁸⁹

In the economic crash of 2008 it is believed that policymakers avoided another great depression by shifting their world view from models based on rational decision makers to a trial and error system.⁹⁰ As Paul Ormerod states “they knew it was impossible to work out the optimal strategy. So they tried things which seemed reasonable and (quite literally) hoped for the best.”⁹¹ The first major part of this trial and error strategy was to allow Lehman Brothers to go bust. The result was a disaster so the US authorities quickly discarded laissez-faire in favour of intervention, starting a process of nationalisation.

A similar strategy of trial and error for brand planning is becoming appropriate due to the dominance of System 1 thinking, the increasing complexity of the world and the opportunity digital provides for low cost testing.

This is confirmed by thinking from the field of knowledge management. The Cynefin Framework distils problems into four types and gives a guide to how businesses should make decisions depending on the type of problem.⁹² The different types of problems and decision processes are summarised below:



Agencies mostly misdiagnose brand problems as either complicated or simple and act accordingly. This leads us to believe that we can predict the outcome of decisions and ensure success. This is not true, marketing is not fail-safe, products and campaigns often fail. As the world has become more complicated and our understanding of human decision-making has become clearer (less rational more emotional) there is a strong call for marketing to move to a more complex system of decision-making.⁹³

The complex system runs on a probe-sense-respond process which advises companies to constantly experiment, making many little bets instead of a few big ones.⁹⁴ The bets that succeed are amplified and those that don't are dampened. Importantly, this system stresses that we shouldn't do anything without identifying strategies to amplify and dampen activity in advance. This is strikingly different to how agencies and marketing currently work with briefs set for months - sometimes years - of activity, based around one big bet or idea.

The world is unpredictable - there is no way to predict what will work and what will not. Accordingly, we need to start testing and learning; we need to have a safe-fail not a fail-safe attitude, in which failure is encouraged. With this process brands don't succeed despite failure, they succeed because of failure.⁹⁵ This process of learning and experimenting should be on-going as the environment around brands is constantly changing and these changes have an impact on the potential for success of any product or campaign.

This new way of working means that brands need to start to consider their KLIs (key learning indicators) in addition to KPIs.⁹⁶ KLIs need to provide behavioural feedback on actions by brands, illustrating which activity has the greatest effects and allowing us to constantly augment the experience.

Conclusion

"Marketing in the future will be like sex. Only losers will have to pay for it"
Jon Bond⁶⁷

All brands communicate explicitly and implicitly. Currently, planning 'explicit communication' dominates thinking as it is easy to control and the clear remit of the marketing department.

A brand's implicit communication embodies everything a brand does meaning responsibility is split across departments, making it harder to manage and exploit.

But difficulty should not mean prevention. The strongest brands in the future shall be those that ensure every decision and action reinforces the brand's positioning.

As Clever Hans taught us, it's not what brands say but the signals they create which matter most.

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