

Everything is media: A new approach to media and storytelling in the new digital era

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Alon Weinpress has extensive experience in marketing, branding and change management. A former marketing director and now the owner of Weinpress Marketing, a successful branding and marketing agency, he excels in helping businesses craft their narratives and lead tribes of true fans. Alon's 'everything is media' philosophy empowers brands across various sectors — including business, tech startups, higher education and nonprofits — to tell a cohesive and compelling story, enabling them to thrive in the digital landscape. Alon has been awarded for digital innovation in marketing, frequently publishes insightful articles on branding and marketing strategy, and is a sought-after speaker at industry conferences. He holds an MBA with honours from TAU.

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Abstract

In today's digital age, where consumers are bombarded with messages and have short attention spans, brands face the challenge of standing out. This paper proposes a paradigm shift for brands: viewing every interaction as a potential media opportunity. Drawing from case studies like Nike, Stella Artois and Glassdoor, it illustrates how brands can leverage routine interactions with their target audiences to craft compelling narratives, adapting to evolving consumer expectations. This paper suggests a practical model for identifying and maximising these media touchpoints, emphasising the importance of storytelling and authenticity. As technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) continue to evolve, the role of branding and marketing is poised for transformation, with new possibilities emerging to engage audiences in innovative ways.

Keywords

strategy, branding, transformative touch media, storytelling, marketing, digital marketing, performance marketing, data-driven content, artificial intelligence (AI), customer experience, customer journey, social media, digital transformation

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THE OMNIPRESENCE OF MEDIA IN CONTEMPORARY EXISTENCE

In the digital age, media permeates every facet of daily life, shaping thoughts, emotions and behaviours. From news and entertainment to everyday interactions and advertising, its influence is undeniable.

As presented in Figure 1, on average, people spend 6h and 35 minutes online

daily, with this number rising to 7h and 13 minutes in the USA, according to the Digital 2024 Global Overview Report.¹ Smartphone usage has become habitual, with many checking their devices every 5 minutes.² The once-lauded multitasking is now recognised as ineffective, often leading to a state of continuous partial attention, as defined by Linda Stone.³ The average attention

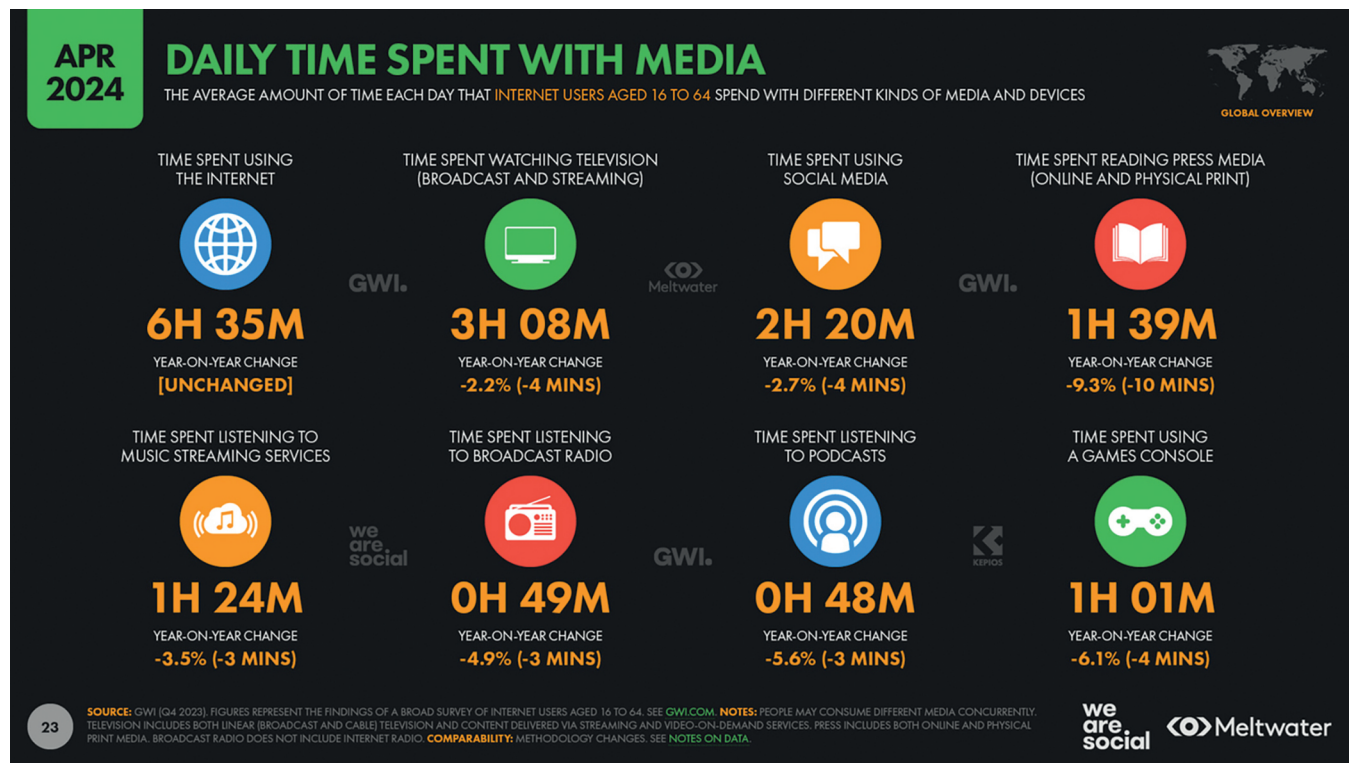


Figure 1 Daily time spent with media

Source: Digital 2024 April Global Statshot Report.

span has drastically reduced, dropping from 12 seconds in 2000 to 8.25 seconds in just 15 years.⁴

The concept that ‘everything is media’ extends beyond traditional views, suggesting that every interaction a brand has with its audience is a media opportunity. This perspective encourages brands to view all engagements, even those not traditionally classified as media, as opportunities to tell their story. Just as Thales saw water as the essence of all things, ‘media’ now becomes the essence of brand existence, guiding how companies build and maintain their presence in the modern world.

ELEVATING EVERYDAY TOUCHPOINTS TO MEDIA

The media landscape can be broadly categorised into three types: paid media,

owned media and earned media.⁵ Historically, paid media included traditional advertising channels like television, radio and print, where brands paid for exposure. This form of ‘mass media’ offered significant reach but was accessible mainly to those with large budgets.

With the rise of digital media, the focus has shifted towards owned media, which includes digital assets like websites, social media pages, e-commerce sites, podcasts, videos, blogs, newsletters and webinars. Here, the emphasis is on content creation rather than monetary expenditure, making content the new ‘king’.⁶ Success in this space depends on the quality and relevance of the content and its ability to engage the target audience.

Earned media, on the other hand, is exposure gained through organic means,

such as reviews, recommendations and endorsements. This form of media is often seen as more credible because it comes from external sources rather than paid advertisements. Apparently, the lines between genuine advocacy and commercial promotion can blur, especially with influencer marketing and sponsored content. As consumers become more aware of these nuances, the authenticity of earned media is increasingly scrutinised.

The concept that ‘everything is media’ transcends the confines of traditional media classifications, contending that numerous other avenues exist — both physical and digital — which are often overlooked, thereby squandering untapped opportunities. This expansive and heterogeneous array of media channels, herein termed ‘Transformative Touch Media’, underscores the need for businesses to scrutinise every interface and touchpoint with their target audiences, both internal and external, through a media-centric lens. From the office wall and elevator to the call centre and courier service, from the packaging and SMS notifications to the error page on the website and beyond, each interaction represents a potential medium for conveying the brand’s narrative. By recognising and harnessing these diverse media touchpoints, businesses can unlock new avenues for brand storytelling and engagement, thereby augmenting their strategic communication efforts.

Furthermore, brands that embrace this notion can embark on a journey of exploration, seeking to uncover additional touchpoints where their target audience frequents, identify opportune moments for engagement and pinpoint other facets of their lives that intersect

with the brand narrative. This proactive approach enables the identification of novel touchpoints with the target audience, transforming them into burgeoning media opportunities awaiting exploitation.

CASE STUDIES IN TRANSFORMATIVE TOUCH MEDIA

The notion of transformative touch media, albeit abstract, gains elucidation through the examination of select brand case studies, which adeptly capitalise on routine interactions with their target audiences, transforming these moments into compelling and unconventional media opportunities.

The McDonald’s ‘Happy Moment’ campaign

One such exemplary case study is the ‘Happy Moment’ campaign by McDonald’s, which garnered acclaim with a bronze medal in the outdoor category at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity in 2023. In an era where many companies in the restaurant and fast-food sectors opt to outsource their courier services, McDonald’s maintains this pivotal aspect of the consumer experience. Recognising that delivery services significantly influence consumer perceptions, McDonald’s reframed delivery encounters as integral touchpoints for brand storytelling.

The pioneering campaign by McDonald’s launched in Colombia in March 2023, aiming to enhance awareness of its home delivery service. Aptly named ‘A Second of Happiness’, the initiative tapped into the inherent excitement associated with receiving a food order. The McDelivery Crew



Figure 2 A Second of Happiness by McDonald's
Source: <https://en.esloganmagazine.com/mc-donalds-delivery-a-second-of-happiness/>

captured customers' reactions at the moment of food handover, utilising cameras discreetly installed in their caps. These candid snapshots encapsulated the essence of 'happy chaos' — a term coined by McDonald's to capture the rush of emotions accompanying the arrival of a food delivery, as illustrated in Figure 2.⁷

What sets McDonald's strategy apart is its keen recognition of the intrinsic value inherent in the anticipation of delivery and the pivotal moment when the doorbell announces the arrival of the meal. By authentically capturing these moments, McDonald's not only leverages the interaction between courier and consumer but also enriches the narrative surrounding the entire delivery experience. This insightful approach underscores McDonald's dedication to crafting authentic and impactful brand narratives that transcend traditional advertising boundaries.

The Tiffany blue box

Another compelling case study showcasing the efficacy of transformative touch media is exemplified by Tiffany & Co., the renowned luxury jeweller synonymous with elegance and refinement. Tiffany stands among the

few brands whose signature brand colour, Pantone 1837 (named after the company's founding year), is a registered trademark. Consequently, the colour itself is immediately associated with the brand and emotionally linked with the 'forget-me-not' story, resonating deeply with the brand's luxury jewellery, often purchased as gifts for significant occasions.

Tiffany's meticulous attention to packaging, including the crafting and symbolic significance of their signature blue box, illustrates the idea that even standard elements like gift wrapping can serve as powerful forms of media for communicating a brand's narrative and identity. As Tiffany states on their website, 'The Tiffany blue box has symbolised far more than the precious design it contains. It has long overflowed with promises of possibility, dreams and, of course, love'.⁸ This focus not only showcases their commitment to luxury and excellence but also underscores the significance of packaging as a medium for shaping perceptions and building brand loyalty.

Through meticulous attention to detail and impeccable presentation, Tiffany elevates the act of unboxing a product into a moment of anticipation and delight. Each blue box is crafted with precision and adorned with the brand's signature ribbon, fostering a sense of exclusivity and luxury. This treatment of packaging as media encourages customers to share their unboxing experiences on social media platforms, often using the hashtag #TiffanyBlueBox, thereby amplifying the reach and impact of Tiffany's story.

Thousands of unboxing videos by enthusiastic customers on TikTok and YouTube garner hundreds of thousands, and sometimes millions, of views, along with numerous appreciative comments, effectively transforming routine customer

interactions to reinforce the brand's identity and foster a sense of belonging among its audience.

The life-extending stickers

Media can sometimes be found in the most trite and mundane places, as illustrated by a Colombian retailer, Makro. Typically, there is nothing particularly exciting or engaging about fruit stickers. Fruits are mostly commodities, sold by weight, with small stickers bearing the brand name or logo, making it difficult to imagine them conveying any brand story. Yet, Makro saw potential in these stickers as a form of media that no one had likely considered before, and successfully used this media to change consumer behaviour for the better and address a business issue.

Data from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Colombian

National Department of Planning indicate that Colombians waste approximately 6.1m tonnes of food annually, with fruits and vegetables accounting for 40 per cent of this waste.⁹

To address this issue, cash-and-carry wholesaler Makro, in collaboration with Grey Colombia, Bogotá, launched the 'Life Extending Stickers' campaign in April 2023 (as illustrated in Figure 3). These stickers feature recipe suggestions tailored to the ripeness of fruits and vegetables, mimicking the colour of each food item at various stages of ripeness. For instance, a banana's sticker transitions from green to yellow to brown and finally black, with a serving or cooking suggestion over each colour. According to Juan Yepes, Marketing Director of Makro Colombia, 'We used a media that has existed for decades in the fruit and vegetable industry, the Fruit Sticker. We



Figure 3 The Life Extending Stickers Campaign by Makro
Source: <https://www.vml.com/work/life-extending-stickers>

gave it a real purpose: To prevent food waste by extending their life cycles and suggesting recipes based on the fruit's ripeness and colour, especially in their most ripe stages when people avoid their consumption for cosmetic reasons'.¹⁰

This innovative campaign garnered more than 85,000 interactions on social networks and reached an audience of 264m through organic articles in over 25 countries.¹¹ Additionally, it assisted in reducing 70 tonnes of food waste in a week, combining waste from stores and homes. The campaign was recognised with a gold award in the outdoor category at the 2023 Cannes Lions Festival.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

After establishing the 'everything is media' approach and presenting case studies that illustrate the creative realisation of this concept, the question arises: Why does it matter?

From the examples presented here, it is clear that this approach can assist in developing creative solutions systematically. *The systematic inventive thinking (SIT)* methodology provides a structured method for generating ideas through systematic manipulations. One of the principles proposed by the model is task unification: solving a problem by assigning a new use or role to an existing object.¹²

Structured thinking about daily interactions with customers and potential customers as media opportunities can encourage the development of creative ideas, such as using the McDonald's deliveryman's hat to capture 'moments of happiness'. Apparently, this approach entails much more than merely generating creative ideas. In today's era, it is a crucial strategic approach to creating a brand that tells a holistic story and offers customers with genuine value through a complete experience.

In this context, two relevant features emerge.

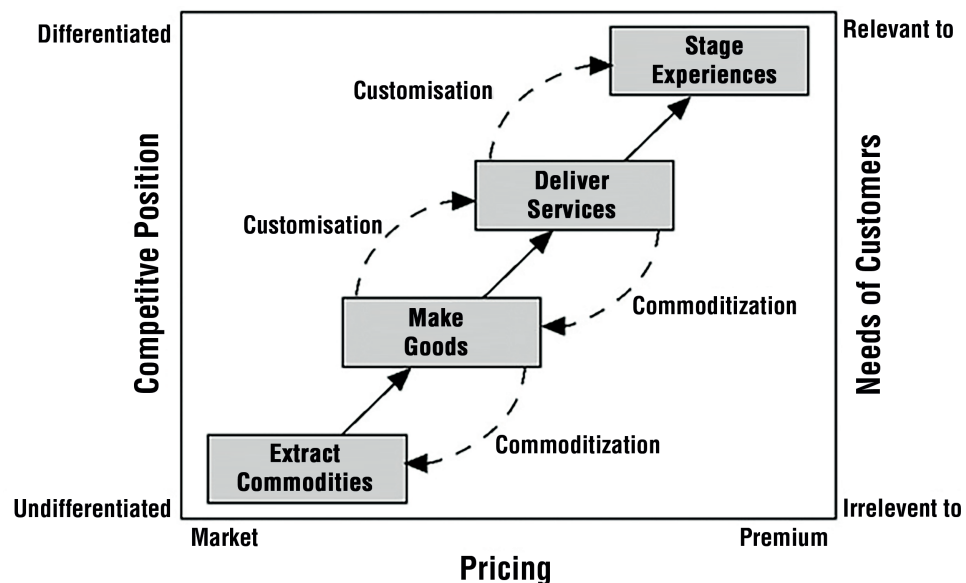


Figure 4 The progression of economic value

Source: <https://innovationmanagement.se/2011/09/30/joe-pine-economic-value-creation-through-the-experience-economy/>

Firstly, as Gilmore and Pine¹³ have expressed, we live in an experience economy. According to their model of the progression of economic value (as illustrated in Figure 4), businesses seeking to create abundance and prosper in the current economy will find that the next competitive battleground lies in staging experiences: ‘an experience is not an amorphous construct; it is as real an offering as any service, good or commodity’. Furthermore, as Seth Godin succinctly states, people don’t want what you make; they want what it will do for them. Therefore, businesses must tell stories, make connexions and create experiences.¹⁴

Following these approaches, every business needs to think like Disney — creating more and more experiences from every interaction with their customers.

The second feature is the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which began in the early twenty-first century and focuses on the characteristics of the digital revolution characterised by ubiquitous mobile phones, significantly cheaper and smaller sensors, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning. The digital revolution changes every aspect of daily life, some of its effects were discussed earlier. According to Klaus Schwab in his book ‘The Fourth Industrial Revolution’,¹⁵ the changes brought by this revolution do not bypass consumer expectations. Customer expectations are being redefined into experiences. ‘The Apple experience, for example, is not just about how customers use the product but also about the packaging, the brand, the shopping and the customer service. Apple is thus redefining expectations to include product experience’.

As digital penetrates more places in daily life within the framework of that

digital revolution, the distinctions between the virtual and the ‘real’ world are blurred, and consumers expect a seamless and complete experience in all dimensions: digital, physical and biological, enhancing each other rather than just complementing each other. Therefore, omnichannel marketing has become a leading marketing strategy that utilises online and offline marketing and considers that the purchase process can start online and end offline or vice versa.¹⁶

In the experience economy, staging an experience requires marketers to adopt the thinking of a movie director or a theatre director. They need a ‘plot’, that is, a brand story that generates an experience, and a stage on which they will tell the story in every interaction with their target audience — both online and offline — throughout the entire customer journey.

As businesses adapt to the fourth industrial revolution and the principles of the experience economy, the concept of ‘everything is media’ gains significance. It provides a strategic framework for leveraging digital and physical touchpoints to create immersive brand experiences. For example, for 70 years (between 1951 and 2021), IKEA’s iconic annual catalogue, which for other businesses is simply a technical specification of products and prices, served as a medium through which IKEA conveyed its experience ‘To create a better everyday life for the many people’. By doing so, the catalogue came to look more and more like a home furnishing guide that also reflected people’s everyday lives.¹⁷ IKEA adapted its catalogue to the digital age by using augmented reality apps and print catalogues to help customers find affordable furniture. As presented in Figure 5¹⁸ Customers can preview how

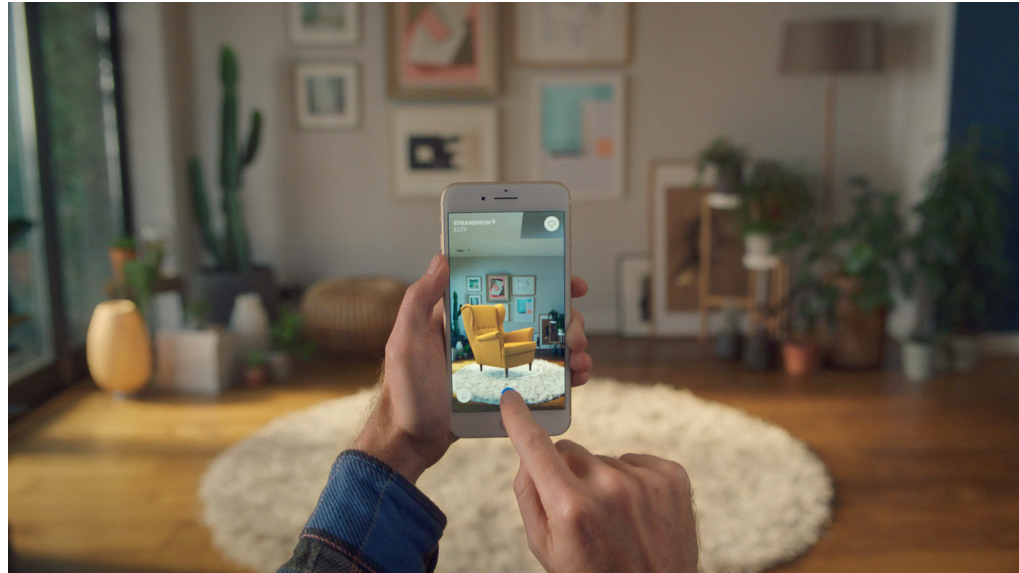


Figure 5 IKEA's augmented reality app for visualising furniture placement
© Inter IKEA Systems B.V. 2023

furniture will look in their home by placing the print catalogue where they plan to place the furniture and using the app to visualize it.

In this way, the online and offline experience remains continuous, supporting the brand story and being supported by it. The catalogue, the mobile device and the consumers' homes, — all of these are legitimate media that convey the story as part of the consumption experience and the interaction that naturally occurs between the brand and consumers and not as an external advertisement that comes from outside the customer journey and therefore easier to remain indifferent to it.

All these factors affect the business's bottom line — both in the short and long term. In the long term, it is well known that building a strong and distinctive brand through unique storytelling and experiences generates preference and keeps the brand top of mind for consumers. As Binet and

Field have repeatedly demonstrated in their research analysing hundreds of campaigns from the IPA Databank, as shown in Figure 6, focusing on marketing effectiveness, brand building becomes the primary driver of growth from sales activation after six months.¹⁹

In the short term, creating experiences in every interaction between the brand and its target audiences — based on the understanding that everything is media — keeps the brand close to its consumers throughout all stages of the purchase journey: from information search and consideration to purchase and product usage. In the digital age with consumers' limited attention, this holds significant meaning in the likelihood that the target audience will engage with the brand's story and ultimately make a purchase or repeat purchase. This is because of the likelihood that the brand captures their attention at those moments when they are truly receptive to receiving messages and connecting with

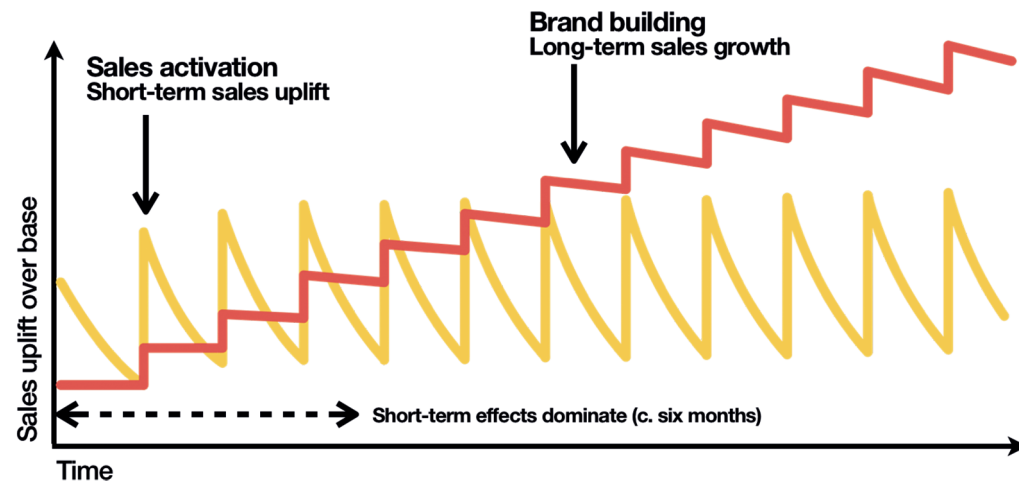


Figure 6 Binet and Field's model illustrating short-term sales impact vs. long-term brand building effects.

Source: Binet, Les and Peter Field. 'The Long and the Short of it: Balancing Short and Long-Term Marketing Strategies'.

them — moments coined by Google as 'micro-moments', where consumers know what they want, when they want it and are drawn to brands that fulfil their needs. Therefore, Google recommends 'to create a seamless customer experience across all screens and channels'²⁰ — which reinforces the importance of omnichannel marketing and connects it to the bottom line of sales and profit.

In other words, individuals are more likely to engage with IKEA's narrative of 'To create a better everyday life' when envisioning how a sofa from their catalogue would fit into their living room. Consequently, they are inclined to make a purchase. This contrasts with encountering the same narrative through a random billboard while driving or repeatedly seeing IKEA's advertisement as they scroll endlessly through their Facebook or Instagram feed.

Perceiving marketing as promotion alone

At times, to sharpen a particular perception, it is necessary to present its

opposing view. Standing at the opposite end of the notion that everything is media is the belief, prevalent among too many businesses and marketers, a marketing and branding strategy can rely exclusively on promotion, particularly through paid media. Whether one considers *McCarthy's* marketing mix²¹ outdated and in need of updating or still relevant, it should be evident that brand building and marketing strategies cannot rely solely on promotional activities. Product, price, distribution channels, company employees and the community the brand builds around itself are essential components in marketing efforts, and further to the concept here, they too constitute media.

Much can be learnt from the case of Stella Artois, which, while adhering to the notion that everything is media, can ensure success and profitability; however, deviating from this principle may lead to a severe downfall.

Stella Artois has stood as a paragon of steadfast brand narrative preservation since the early 1980s, demonstrating a laudable commitment

to its established ethos. Although the concept of ‘reassuringly expensive’ subtly transitioned into the aphorism ‘perfection has its price’ during the 1980s and 1990s, the underlying narrative remains immutable.

The narrative fidelity of Stella encountered a pivotal juncture during the 2000s when the brand’s decision to proliferate its presence in supermarkets and grocery outlets led to a critical misstep. This strategic misjudgement, incongruent with the brand’s luxury positioning predicated on premium pricing, catalysed unforeseen repercussions. Coupled with the libation’s relatively elevated alcohol content, Stella Artois garnered fervent favour among demographics seeking inebriation at minimal expense, especially in Britain, notably encompassing football aficionados, hooligan cohorts and societal agitators. Media depictions showcasing individuals brandishing Stella cans amidst scenes of civil unrest propagated detrimental associations, besmirching the brand’s image and catalysing an inexorable erosion of its perceived prestige. So pronounced was this shift that the nickname ‘wife beater’ stuck to the brand in the UK, and pub landlords opted to expunge the libation from their offerings.²²

In a concerted effort to improve its tarnished reputation and reclaim its former status as a provider of premium libations, Stella Artois underwent a significant strategic realignment. Recognising the limitations of relying solely on traditional television commercials for substantive rehabilitation, the brand embarked on a comprehensive restructuring. It reinstated a fervent dedication to the foundational principle that every aspect of the brand’s expression serves as a channel for media

dissemination. In this holistic approach, bartenders, the art of beer dispensation, the presentation of libations and indeed the libations themselves were reconceived as conduits through which the brand narrative could be carefully curated and communicated.

Through the recalibration of its marketing strategies, Stella Artois exemplifies the importance of narrative coherence and strategic alignment with brand identity. By integrating this fundamental principle into its operational ethos, Stella charted a path towards redemption, affirming the enduring truth that within the domain of brand stewardship, every interaction functions as a medium for narrative dissemination and cultivation.

In the last decade, Stella Artois has increasingly focussed on experiences. As former Vice President of Marketing, Ricardo Marques, explained in an interview with *Forbes*, the brand’s shift from ‘perfection has its price’ to new narratives reflects a broader cultural trend: ‘People are starting to appreciate much more the time they spend with their friends, with their families, and the experiences that they can share together’.²³

In alignment with this new direction, the brand launched its ‘Make Time For The Life Artois’ campaign in 2022. This initiative encourages consumers to prioritise the real world over the virtual one and to return to responsible in-person dining. Recognising that the dining table and dining in restaurants are crucial touchpoints for connecting with their target audience, Stella Artois has pursued various strategies to embed itself in these experiences. From events like ‘Let’s Do Dinner’, offering fans the chance to attend ‘The World’s Most Fascinating Dinner’ party with celebrities,²⁴ to opening

a chain of branded restaurants²⁵ and even reshaping household consumption through partnerships with Uber Eats, Yelp and Instacart²⁶ — Stella Artois has adeptly positioned the dining table as a key ‘media’ channel.

DIGITAL STORYTELLING — TRANSFORMING DATA INTO MEDIA

Despite consumers’ increasing expectations for digital experiences, the advent of performance tools and AI has tempted many marketers to sideline strategic planning and investment in strong brand building. Performance media, such as sponsored ads on Facebook, Instagram and Google, now utilise AI to enhance performance, promising to target the right individual at the right micro-moment with the most effective message at the lowest cost and with immediate measurable results. While performance marketing enables the deployment of numerous messages (which can be generated using AI) and allows AI tools to focus on the most effective message for a given audience, many executives worry that performance marketing is overshadowing brand-building activities.²⁷ This concern stems from the mistaken belief that technology can replace strategy and that performance media is the only relevant media.

Experienced marketers and professionals know that even, or perhaps especially, in the digital age where the human touch becomes a rare and valued resource, storytelling is the future. As Celinne Da Costa, a writer and brand storytelling coach, suggests, businesses need to connect with audiences, evoke emotional responses and engage on a much deeper level than ever before. This makes brand storytelling essential and the key to maximising the business’s visibility,

profit and impact. Treat storytelling as the compass for the marketing strategy, and the result will be a brand that is as profitable as it is captivating.²⁸

Thus, as emphasised by Stengel, Lamberton and Favaro, branding and performance marketing must work together, with the understanding that branding influences the results of performance tools, and conversely, performance marketing affects brand perception.²⁷ This is consistent with Binet and Field’s conclusions in their updated research on marketing effectiveness in the digital era,²⁹ which holds that brand building is crucial in the digital age and recommends synergy between all media channels and a better balance between brand-building strategy and short-term sales strategies.

A study by SimplicityDX³⁰ highlights the increasing challenges marketers face due to changes like increased consumer privacy legislation and the demise of third party cookies. These factors have significantly affected the effectiveness of performance marketing, as evidenced by a 222 per cent increase in customer acquisition cost (CAC) in 2022 compared to 2013. Consequently, marketers are seeking alternative or complementary media channels, such as delivering personalised paper catalogues to customers’ homes instead of relying solely on digital advertising.

The storytelling power of data

The concept that ‘everything is media’ not only balances branding with performance marketing but also encourages marketers to explore new media avenues. It suggests that in the digital age, data itself is a form of media. Data-driven content enables brands — both tangible and technological — to

leverage the benefits of digital data collection and analysis to craft relevant brand narratives that deeply resonate with their target audiences.

In the realm of tangible consumer products, Nike's running club serves as a prime example. Nike understands that the most significant interaction consumers have with their brand occurs during sports activities. By transforming these interactions, along with the data collected through their app, into media, Nike creates content like running distances, average speeds, heart rates and routes. This user-generated content, shared among fellow amateur runners, fosters a community or 'tribe' around the 'Just Do It' brand ethos, with specific relevance to the running club's motto, 'Don't Wanna Run, Run'. According to Godin, tribes are the best way to spread ideas³¹ — here, the tribe not only spreads the idea but also generates the content and participates in building the narrative.

This strategy is equally effective in the technological and B2B sectors. Companies like Glassdoor and Gong collect data through user interactions with their platforms. Glassdoor, a site where employees review companies anonymously, leverages user-generated data to create relevant stories for workers globally. For instance, their 2016 report on gender pay gaps,³² derived from a vast and unprecedented dataset of crowd-sourced salaries, has generated substantial earned media, including social media discussions, news reports and roundtable events under the Glassdoor brand.

Similarly, Gong, a revenue intelligence platform that uses AI to analyse sales conversations, initially collects data to fulfil its promise of improving its clients' sales processes. Nevertheless, Gong recognises the marketing potential of



Figure 7 Gong's LinkedIn content showcasing data-driven insights with impactful brand visuals

Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/gong-io/>

this data, using it to craft engaging, data-driven brand stories. This content appeals to their target audience, such as chief marketing officers and sales executives, by providing insights that are not only valuable for improving sales but also compelling from a storytelling perspective.

As exemplified by the image from their LinkedIn profile shown in Figure 7,³³ some of Gong's most successful content includes data-driven insights presented with strong, brand-consistent graphics and infographics that resonate emotionally with their B2B audience.³⁴ This approach acknowledges the power of emotion in B2B contexts, blending branding with performance.

It is worth noting that a company like Gong, which excels in crafting engaging stories from data, demonstrates the ability to bring in substantial direct traffic, as shown in Figure 8.³⁵ This highlights the effectiveness of leveraging business data as a medium for storytelling, ultimately driving meaningful engagement and site visits.

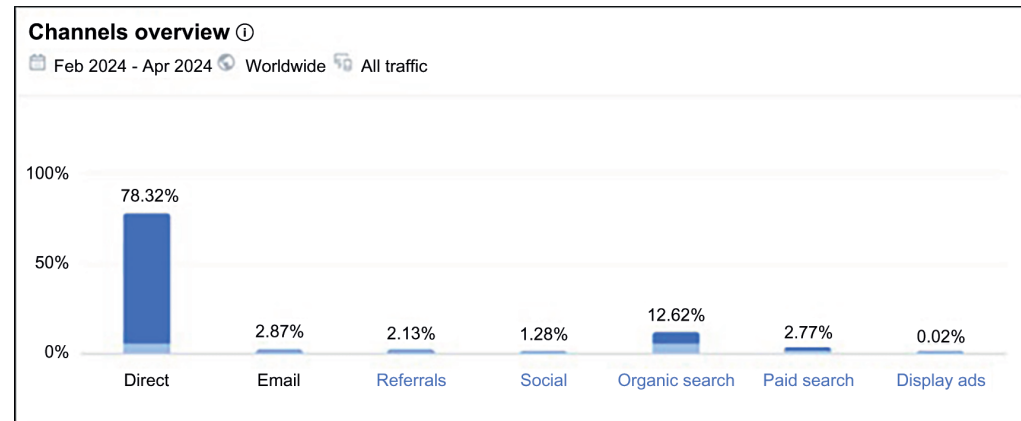


Figure 8 Traffic sources to Gong's website (Feb–Apr 2024), showing the dominance of direct traffic (created by the author via SimilarWeb
Source: SimilarWeb.

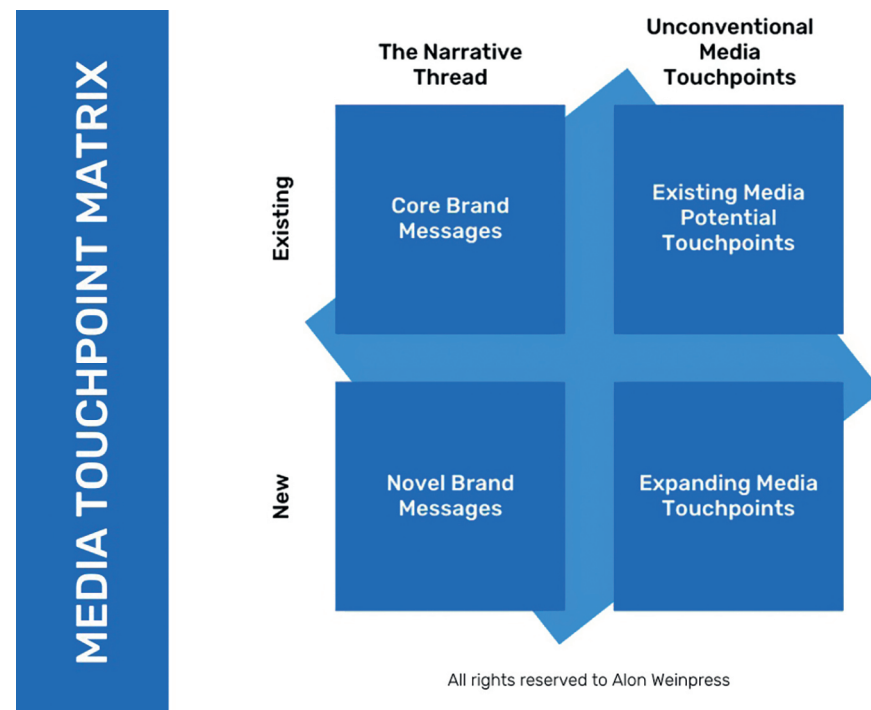


Figure 9 The Media Touchpoint Matrix by Weinpress Marketing

Bridging theory to action — unveiling media gems in everyday interactions

As the notion that every interaction embodies media potential is explored more deeply, it becomes imperative to explore systematic approaches to its

practical application. While there is no singular method to achieve this, presented here is The Media Touchpoint Matrix (as shown in Figure 9) — a model poised to open avenues for creative ideation, delineating how routine interactions

**IF YOU EVER DREAMED OF PLAYING
FOR MILLIONS AROUND THE WORLD,
NOW IS YOUR CHANCE.**

Play inside, play for the world.



Figure 10 'Play Inside, Play for the World': Nike's response to COVID-19

Source: Advertising Association. <https://adassoc.org.uk/ad-pays-8-archive/play-inside-play-for-the-world/>

between businesses and consumers can metamorphose into impactful media narratives.

The narrative thread

Commencing with a foundational narrative is essential. As with any communications strategy, any brand needs to be clear about the story it wants to share with the marketplace.³⁶ Assuming the presence of such a brand narrative, invest time in introspection: articulate the brand narrative and decipher its significance. What messages do you aim to convey through this narrative? How does it resonate with consumers, and which needs does it address? List down all the narrative's components in a comprehensive manner.

Nike can be considered as an exemplar for this model.

In Phil Knight's memoir 'Shoe Dog',³⁷ many themes and anecdotes elucidate the ethos underpinning Nike's iconic 'Just Do It' narrative. From overcoming self-doubt and fear, empowering self-belief, and embracing action, to championing the belief that everybody is an athlete ('If you have a body, you are an athlete'), pushing boundaries, embracing challenges and embodying passion and authenticity, Knight's journey epitomises Nike's core values, both implicitly and explicitly.

Expanding the horizon: Novel messages for the brand narrative

Drawing inspiration from Marty Neumeier's seminal work, 'The Brand Gap',³⁸ which portrays the business as a dynamic process rather than a static entity, it is imperative to dissect the significant changes surrounding the brand environment. How can the brand narrative be aligned with these changes to ensure relevance and cater to evolving consumer expectations, thereby attracting new audiences? This pensive exercise demands time and concerted effort.

Reflecting on Nike's response to the COVID-19 pandemic offers a pertinent example: Nike bolstered its digital footprint and crafted resonant messages like 'Play Inside, Play for the World' (as shown in figure 10³⁹) and 'You Can't Stop Us', fostering consumer engagement amid lockdowns.^{40,41}

The stage: Identifying unconventional media touchpoints

Turning attention to the conduits through which narratives traverse, it is customary to focus on paid, owned and earned media channels. Yet, the emphasis lies on touchpoints typically overlooked by media. Plot the customer journey, enumerating every point of contact. For Nike, this roster would span brand stores, sports outlets, shoeboxes, sports fields, fitness centres, running clubs, video gaming and more.

Expanding media touchpoints

Like narrative development with novel brand messages, leverage this process to unearth new touchpoints ripe for narrative dissemination. Are there unexplored locales or scenarios where your target audience congregates,

presenting an opportune moment to narrate your brand story? Can you assuage pain points or furnish relevant experiences in uncharted territories?

In Nike's epidemic response, it discerned a shift in consumer interactions unfolding within the confines of homes and consequently introduced novel media initiatives such as 'The Living Room Cup' — a digital workout series facilitating athlete-led challenges accessible from home.

This is also an opportunity to part ways with touchpoints that might harm the brand narrative, much like IKEA chose in 2021 to discontinue its catalogue 'because the media landscape and people's behaviour had changed'.³⁸

Harnessing media potential: Fusing narrative messages with diverse touchpoints

Finally, the crux lies in synthesising diverse narrative messages with identified touchpoints. Ponder over innovative methods to channel these messages experientially through the same touchpoints.

Continuing with the Nike analogy, contemplate how shoeboxes could embody the message. 'Everybody is an Athlete', or how a neighbourhood basketball court could serve as a conduit for the message 'Pushing Boundaries'.

Reflecting on Nike's foray into skateboarding⁴², unveils profound insights. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Nike initially struggled to gain a foothold in skateboarding. Yet, by 2004, the brand successfully established its dominance with the Nike SB line, a success attributed not only to product quality but also to understanding and tapping into youth culture, as highlighted by Baird and Witt in their

discussion of Gen Z's influence on brand credibility.⁴³

In order to gain 'street cred', Nike SB developed a simple overall strategy: selling exclusively to core skate shops, advertising solely in skateboard magazines and sponsoring well-respected professional skateboarders. In addition to purchased media, Nike explored other avenues to communicate its message of narrative authenticity to the sub-culture community. This includes launching the first skateboarder signature shoe, hosting skateboarding competitions, supporting DIY Skate Spots and creating pop-up shops.

In essence, the realisation that everything embodies media transforms boundaries into horizons, much like the boundless skies of the skateboarding realm.

By embracing these principles, marketing directors can navigate the labyrinth of routine interactions, unveiling media gems awaiting discovery and orchestrating narratives that resonate deeply with their audience, thereby transcending the constraints of traditional media.

CONCLUSION

Successful brands, whether in consumer products, technology companies or B2B sectors, leverage their daily touchpoints with their target audience to transform them into media. This strategy conveys the brand's narrative and delivers an experience that sets them apart from competitors. In this paper, a model is introduced that enables brands to strategically and creatively convert both existing and new daily touchpoints into media. This approach allows businesses to construct a complete customer journey spanning both physical and digital realms,

striking the right balance between branding and media performance. It recognises that every brand's interaction with its environment is a form of media, with each interaction affecting both short-term and long-term business outcomes.

As technology rapidly advances, the branding and marketing landscape continuously evolves. The emergence of AI and its diverse applications expands the realm of possibilities, prompting marketers to embrace novel media channels and storytelling techniques to maintain a competitive edge in a dynamic environment.

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