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Rhetorically Ascribed Meaning in Marketing: The Role of Narrative in Establishing Exchange Value

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RHETORICALLY ASCRIBED MEANING IN MARKETING: THE ROLE OF NARRATIVE IN ESTABLISHING EXCHANGE VALUE

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By

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ABSTRACT

RHETORICALLY ASCRIBED MEANING IN MARKETING: THE ROLE OF NARRATIVE IN ESTABLISHING EXCHANGE VALUE

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Use value and exchange value, concepts explored by Aristotle, are terms dealing with the natural function of an object and the object's worth in an exchange, respectively. In this work, Aristotle's concepts are applied to contemporary marketing practices and other aspects of culture in order to evaluate the way in which meaning is ascribed to objects. The role of the brand, for example, is to alter the exchange value of an object, while the use value can be left unchanged. Brands are indicative of exchange value because they have no substance to speak of, and they are a matter of convention; what they are and what they stand for is in no way fixed. Marketing practitioners develop brands largely by fusing objects with culture, and culture as well as cultural perceptions can change. As a reflection of culture, marketing practitioners use stories and identities in much the same way that culture independent of marketing would ascribe meaning. While

branding and other marketing practices rely extensively on culture to form their bases, they are not the only source of cultural meaning because factors such as family and tradition also have influence. When factors such as these imbue objects with meaning, they, too, can affect exchange value, but they have origins outside the marketplace. I use the term narrative value to differentiate this source of meaning from marketing practices. Narrative value has to do with tradition and collective understandings of community, whereas brands are constructed by external means, as works of fiction. When culture is placed in objects as a reflection of the marketplace, the culture lacks the structure and durability of more traditional culture, and such ascribed meaning can be easily altered or eradicated. Narrative value, then, is an idea separate from marketing yet with the ability to impact worth in exchange.

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Chapter One: The Relationship with Objects

Found in an object is its inherent capability to fulfill some goal or function. As human beings, we come to value and appreciate objects because of the purposes they serve in our lives. Different objects are used for different reasons, as they help us to sustain life, deal with otherwise difficult tasks, and even perform feats that would be impossible given our bodies' physical limitations.

As a result of marketing practices, however, objects are attributed value that extends beyond just that of use. Derived from an external source, this kind of value does not necessarily mean a change in the object, but rather a change in the worth ascribed to the object. Cultural practices and tradition are also capable of imbuing objects with additional value, and, though similar in practice to marketing, are distinct from marketing. These kinds of ideas are central to this work, and will be the primary point of discussion.

I remember an experience I had once shopping for clothes at the mall. I was with a friend who said that I should take the opportunity to go and buy a shirt. This friend, who is very much into fashion and brand name clothing, recommended that I look for a shirt to buy at Express Men. I found the experience to be particularly interesting because I did need a shirt, obviously, but my friend specifically suggested that the shirt come from Express/carry the Express brand. My friend and I ultimately selected an Express shirt together—which was, admittedly, perhaps a little better in quality than what you might expect from something more generic—but it got me thinking about brands and what exactly they are and what they represent within our culture. In this example, the shirt chosen was secondary to making sure the shirt came from Express.

I found the entire experience curious. On the one hand, it is clear the shirt exists as an object that fulfills a certain role in life—a seemingly necessary role. On the other hand, the brand exists as something altogether different, even if the shirt is one of the products that are in the brand's product line. The brand appears to exist in an ethereal way—where is it? What is it? By placing the brand upon the object, there appears to be a new understanding and a new life for that object.

The Role of Objects

Objects that we encounter, consume, and utilize in our daily lives perform functions for us in the sense that they serve some purpose. Beyond just that purpose, however, objects can take on a meaning that surpasses their mere function. The Express name and logo, in this example, stand for quality and status regardless of the specific shirt.

In the marketplace today, meaning is reflected through branding and marketing practices. In such practices, marketing practitioners have the goal of placing value on objects that might not otherwise be derived. The issue, though, is that we as humans derive meaning in objects from places other than the marketplace.

What, then, do these meanings look like? More specifically, how can meaning be added to objects that serve such functions? How can meaning be supplemented further? What actually works in adding supplemental meaning? Perhaps most importantly, how exactly is the meaning ascribed and how is it constructed? Answers to these questions require much consideration and thought, extending beyond mere techniques, gimmicks, and ploys commonly attributed to the marketplace; hence the following work attempts to flesh out and explain how we can come to such understandings through philosophical and theoretical thought, ultimately showcasing the ways in which meaning can be ascribed to things—as well as how the marketplace has taken on this role in a time when the role is void in other areas.

At first glance, marketing as a meaning-adding practice seems almost arbitrary. In order to illustrate this point, Twitchell (2004) recalled an individual, who, "finding two quarters…would announce that his job was to convince the consumer that the quarter in his right hand was worth more than the one in his left" (p. 5). The statement seems funny when put into context, simply because we understand quarters to have a certain set worth that is not likely to be altered.

The difficulty lies in believing that someone could convince us that one quarter is somehow worth more than another. Despite the fact that the quarters remain physically unaltered, their ascribed value would be changed. The point Twitchell (1996) made is well taken: branding involves taking objects that are similar and granting them different values. Through marketing and advertising, practitioners can "give objects" a specific "identity," and therefore a certain "value" (Twitchell, 1996, p. 13). The identity is designed to impact consumer perception.

Tension comes through granting such an identity; consumers must understand the identity in conjunction with and in light of object use. Often we think of using words to make sense of things, as communication allows us to identify objects and their characteristics. We call a stick a stick, for example, in order to identify the thing as a stick. Burke (1966) described the notion that "words are signs of things" as a "commonsense view," in which things "are thought to be singled out by words which stand for them" (p. 360). Marketing practitioners, however, do not want objects to be identified as mere objects, and will therefore challenge consumer notions of what an object can stand for in a most basic way.

The Role of Marketing

The practice of marketing itself is largely designed to remove goods from their usual, or normal, so to speak, depictions. Burke (1966) explained further the "proposition that 'things are signs of words'" (p. 361). He went on to pose the questions, "Might words be found to possess a 'spirit' particular to their nature as words? And might the things of experience then become in effect the materialization of such spirit, the manifestation of this spirit in visible tangible bodies?" (Burke, 1966, p. 361). If words can be fused into objects the way that objects come to be identified through words, then it would make sense that marketers can use communication to affect perception and this valuation of objects.

Marketing, attempting to give identity to things and thus potentially impacting their value, reinforces this idea; rather than a word merely being used to identify a thing, the things themselves become indicative of cultural meaning. Humans are capable of projecting meaning into things, and when things act as cultural indicators, the things also engender words and meanings. In fact, the things actually become signs of something entirely separate and distinct, something socially constructed—in the above example, value is determined at the onset by companies which seek to brand and market the thing. Failing to understand the socially constructed identity, however, could be detrimental to the company's future when looking to how things are perceived and negotiated among consumers. If Express Men would fail to understand how consumers view their brand of clothing, for instance, it could be a hindrance to understanding both how to market the clothes as well as how to compete in light of what other brands offer which may relate or differ from Express.

What, then, is the identity all about? Douglas and Isherwood (1996) stated that we should not look at products as necessities, but rather as channels designed to be cultural markers. Goods have the capacity to be imbued with culture, at which point they become part of culture. In fact, culture and marketing begin to overlap in ways that can scarcely be distinguished.

Once brands become virtually synonymous with culture, people will look at brands as having all the earmarks of place in culture, as well. Soros (1998) stated that the marketplace and consumption should not be indicators of how people live or what status they have, yet it is clear this is occurring. Within this train of thought is a compelling and complicated argument that forms the basis of our exploration: goods and objects communicate culture.

After all, meaning and status are assumed and understood from what consumers manage to acquire (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996). Though removing oneself from society and culture is one way to avoid these kinds of assumptions (Sennett & Cobb, 1972), it is in reality extremely difficult to avoid belonging to society, and all belongings and possessions are cultural markers that are interpreted within society. The idea of an ascribed meaning in possessions indicates that things will take on meaning and identity beyond just their pure function; where and how this is exactly present in today's culture warrants some discussion.

Unique marketing practices centered around certain brands would certainly be one way we see this effect. Postman (1992) spoke of how "in commerce" we see "fierce competition…[as] not merely a matter of tool against tool…when media make war against each other, it is a case of world-views in collision" (p. 16). Much of the meaning that is carried through objects is cultural and promotes just this kind of view. Found in marketing is a psychologically-driven approach that uses signs and symbols as a way to drive consumption (Postman, 1992).

These ideas are starting points for understanding the impact that brands and branding have on today's marketplace. Common items become distinct and identifiable—where items will hold more or less value depending on the brand and perception of the brand; however, the conversation by no means ends there. Brands are part of our culture, representing characteristics of both self and society. This leads us to a rhetorical way of looking at brands and how they function in the contemporary market.

Aristotle's Economics

Aristotle's work, specifically as it emphasizes money and objects, can be used to inform and understand today's marketplace when applied to contemporary practice. The way in which marketers attempt to increase the value and worth of objects lends itself to Aristotle's views on economics. In fact, his ideas may be more applicable today than ever before.

Specifically, Aristotle's ideas on use value and exchange value are essential to how brands can be understood in a simple sense. What a product does can be attributed to use value, while the practice of branding can affect and impact exchange value. Narratives, stories, and other aspects of culture give us additional outlooks on what can impact exchange value and worth of objects.

Aristotle struggled with what would comprise a fair exchange, an effort that appeared futile. The problem is trying to translate use values of objects into equal exchanges, which is a task too context-heavy to be granted as a universal. Brands are peculiar in this regard simply because they are an external factor in associating value. The concept of a supposedly commensurate or equalized, fair exchange might be impossible to determine, but the marketplace can, in large part, factor into how much value consumers are willing to ascribe to particular brands and products.

In his works, Aristotle spoke of use value and exchange value only briefly, but subsequent secondary literature has expanded upon his ideas. Meikle's (1995) work in particular provided definitions of these terms as put forth by Aristotle. "Use value" is described as the natural characteristics of objects (Meikle, 1995, p. 9). "Exchange value" is conceptually a much deeper idea to comprehend, but essentially has to do with "equations," which rely on the relationship objects have if in fact they are "commensurable in the first place" (Meikle, 1995, p. 9). On the other hand, within the exchange equation, people can exchange things "of different kinds [which] are by nature incommensurable," but then commensurability must be determined apart from natural properties of the objects (Meikle, 1995, p. 9). In these thoughts we see the necessary elements for understanding brands, though with more depth required to fully articulate brands, exchange value, and narrative in a capitalist economy.

Aristotle saw use value as a characteristic indefinitely bound to objects. He believed that things can be both used based upon their properties, and used based upon an exchange. Exchange value, however, can vary depending on circumstance, and so is not consistent or fixed in the way use value is. Aristotle (trans. 1986) specifically explained the unique and exclusive characteristics of use value and exchange value in relation to objects when he discussed how “the uses of every possession are two” (p. 15). The distinction is that, while both uses are linked to the object, one is fully bound and intimately attached to the object, while the other is much more fluid and can change (Aristotle, trans. 1986). Again, these dilemmas with exchange value make it impossible to fully determine a fair exchange.

Aristotle’s discussion of money shed further light on this subject. For Aristotle, “only a substance can have a nature” (Meikle, 1995, p. 17). Money cannot be characterized as a substance and therefore does not have a natural property to speak of (Meikle, 1995). The substance and nature of a thing denote an inseparable connection; its use value and its substance are bound to it and will not change. On the other hand, “Money is exchange value. Its job is to express the exchange value of each commodity independently of that commodity’s own physical body. The use value of a thing is undetachable from its physical body, but its exchange value can be represented in the physical body of the money commodity” (Meikle, 1995, p. 97). For these reasons, money has a unique role in exchange.

Within an exchange, money can be represented without having to be physically present at all and still have a value—credit cards, checks, digital transfers, etc.—thus the rhetorical component of value itself. There is no substance in exchange value, contrasting it from use value, and, as such, exchange value can be detached from the physical body of an object and yet represented and even quantified through money. To this effect, “money is called *nomisma,* because it does not exist by nature [phusis] but [rather] by custom (nomos)” (Meikle, 1995, p. 34). Exchange value itself also operates by custom—

value determinants in exchange are a matter of convention and are measured and assessed by convention. The defining aspects of custom are other than nature, and therefore are not indefinitely bound to objects the way use value is.

Stressing the same notion, Csikszentmihalyi, & Rochberg-Halton (1981) commented that we often look at money as something concrete and "real," despite the fact that it is little more than a "symbol" (p. 31). The example Csikszentmihalyi, & Rochberg-Halton (1981) gave was how:

> a gallon of gasoline today will probably get you as far as it did ten years ago. But a dollar's worth of gasoline will not get you anywhere near as far as it did ten years ago—even if the same dollar bill were used. That is, the physical properties of gasoline are what contribute to its value, whereas the physical properties of a dollar bill are relatively unimportant. What gives money its value and status is the fact that people agree on its worth. (p. 31)

Illustrated in this example is the matter of both convention and persuasion. There are factors that will impact exchange value, such as general agreement on worth. Gasoline may have substance and natural property bound to it by way of its use value—perhaps, fuel for a car—but when it comes to exchange value and somehow quantifying the gasoline in exchange, there is the matter of convention, something separate from its inherent characteristics. The so-called 'dollar's worth' of gas will differ from the decade before, merely for the reason that the dollar, which is used for the sole purpose of exchange, does not have the same exchange value as it might have previously. The gasoline, on the other hand, is static in its use.

The example equation Aristotle (trans. 1986) gave in order to illustrate the idea was "a shoe," which he described as having the potential for being worn or exchanged (p. 15). The use value is a natural property of the shoe and its design. Exchanging the shoe is not to use it in a natural way, since the shoe was designed to be worn (Aristotle, trans. 1986). Using the shoe for exchange removes the shoe from its nature, and is not in line for that which it was "intended" (Aristotle, trans. 1986, p. 15). Use value is a value of the shoe toward that which it intends; its natural use and property. Since things are not created with the intention of exchange, they are therefore incommensurate regarding use value. In other words, natural properties do not conclusively determine how one can conceive of a fair trade or a just exchange. This is where a potential and important place for exchange value is introduced.

Specifically, to exchange the shoe is not at all to make use of it according to its normal function (Aristotle, trans. 1980). Wearing the shoe—the shoe's use value—is to serve a particular objective directly in line with what the shoe was made for. In an exchange, the shoe is removed from its natural constitution and is used for an altogether different purpose or end. Judging the value of the shoe in an exchange proves a futile task when comparing the shoe to objects that have different uses.

There are of course exceptions to the rule. Not everything is made with a natural end of use value in mind. Though we can think of brands as being geared toward exchange value, objects themselves can be geared in much the same way. At times, things *are* made for the purpose of exchange rather than use, an act which has the potential to affect use value.

Take, for example, Aristotle's (trans. 1980) account of the Delphic Knife, and how its design is an attempt to fulfill multiple functions—an attempt to increase the knife's value in an exchange. Aristotle (trans. 1980) described the "Delphic knife," as an object designed to "serve a number of purposes" (p. 3). Such a design is problematic in Aristotle's (trans. 1980) portrayal because he viewed objects as being best the most useful when they are created to fulfill one function and not many. With a single purpose, "ends are most complete, for whatsoever is employed on one subject only, brings that one to much greater perfection than when employed on many" (Aristotle, trans. 1986, p. 2).

Meikle (1995) reflected that the knife's use value is hindered because the end goal of the knife is to gain the most through exchange and not use. In hopes of increasing need and demand for the knife, found through the knife's performing of many functions, the knife's natural property and use value have not been focused. The knife's "deficiency" is in that it was crafted to do many things, and therefore does not exceed in any one specific function: "it is a knife, a file, and a hammer" (Meikle, 1995, p. 89). Since the Delphic Knife was meant and intended to be used in exchange, its uses were increased; unfortunately, the focus on exchange value had an adverse effect on the knife's use value in the sense that it did not really excel in one particular and specific use. Aristotle's concern is not in "using a thing in exchange" but in "making [a thing] to be exchanged" (Meikle, 1995, p. 56)—which is a strong distinction and what occurred in the case of this knife.

The example of the knife illustrates how important exchange had become. Rather than craft a knife that was meant to effectively fulfill the purpose of a knife, the knife's creators gave attention to the knife's overall utility. By designing a tool that had the capacity to handle the job of many different tools, the knife was meant to have multiple uses, and thus be more desirable in exchange.

For Aristotle (trans. 1986), the practice of and focus on exchange resulted in an inevitable outcome; money was created as a way to gauge exchanges. Money, being the embodiment of exchange, does not in fact have use value to speak of; exchange its only use. Money is a very unique exception to objects having use value. Whereas the knife was designed for exchange because it has multiple uses, money was created to have no use other than exchange.

In other words, in exchange, "currency…becomes an intermediate, since it measures everything, and so measures excess and deficiency" (Aristotle, trans. 1999, p. 75). If not for the need of this kind of measure, money would have no purpose at all, as "currency came into existence merely as a means of exchange" (Aristotle, trans. 1980, p. 29). Money is a way to measure how to make an exchange. Money is a way to attribute exchange value. Money allows for an exchange that can be measured or quantified, thus determining the only real value of money.

We must remember that the value of money is based on consensus. As money itself has no natural properties or ends, it is incapable of being valued for its use. Money is therefore defined only by external standards, a characteristic that makes money impossible to depict through any kind of inherent value.

In this regard, when an object is exchanged for money, which has exchange value only, the object is even further removed from its natural uses (Aristotle, trans. 1986). The sentiment turns our attention to the fact that "currency has become a sort of pledge of need, by convention; in fact has its name (*nomisma*) because it is not by nature, but by the current law (*nomos*), and it is within our power to alter it and make it useless" (Aristotle, trans. 1999, p. 75). Quite clearly, what makes the exchange value of things and the exclusive exchange value of money so unnatural is their context sensitivity.

Attributions of exchange value are human endeavors, meaning the exchange value placed upon things does not relate to their natural uses—does not relate to what the things were originally intended for. To reiterate the point made by Csikszentmihalyi, & Rochberg-Halton (1981), the natural characteristics of money are not significant because money finds its value when "people agree on its worth" (p. 31). The "nature" of an object can, in fact, be masked and layered by characteristics that move the object beyond what its normal purpose is (Sennett, 1976, p. 145). Objects have the potential for meaning well beyond their regular function (Sennett, 1976), which is why language and communication around the brand must be carefully constructed in order to communicate the brand essence (Delin, 2005). Humans both create and control this exchange value, as exchange value is an issue of nomos—the value is subject to circumstance, context, and persuasion. In short, the value is rhetorical.

The rhetorical value of an object is easy to comprehend when applied to a brand. Brawny paper towels are a great example. For a brand of paper towel that is promoted as tough and durable, Brawny is afforded a way to stand out from the crowd. Then again, toughness and durability could likely be used to promote other brands of paper towels—say, for instance, Bounty—but Brawny is given this clear association through marketing. By using persuasion and communication, Brawny is rhetorically granted a characteristic that will affect attitudes and perceptions toward the brand.

The idea that exchange value is not according to an object's nature has additional implications. Aristotle (trans. 1980) believed that exchange to fulfill need is at least natural in the sense that "the end itself constitutes a limit" (Aristotle, trans. 1980, p. 25). To put the idea simply, a need for the use of a particular object can be a driver of exchange, as people may be in need of certain objects for the functions they perform. If a consumer were to need paper towels, and then purchase Brawny paper towels to fulfill the specific function, it would comprise a more natural exchange.

An unnatural exchange as discussed previously, however, suggests that when greed and the desire for accumulation take over, there becomes no point of limit (Aristotle, trans. 1980). It is this "art of acquisition" that is "unlimited" (Aristotle, trans. 1980, p. 26). We must recall that a thing's natural characteristics are exclusive of the thing's exchange value (Meikle, 1995) and that money was created only to facilitate exchange (Aristotle, trans. 1980). In Aristotle's view, the purpose of exchange for acquiring wealth or currency and not using exchange for what is needed makes the unnatural characteristic of exchange value all the more unnatural because it has no limit or end. At no point can individuals claim they have satisfied their need for wealth or currency.

Thus we see that exchange value of things is both unnatural—because it is not comparable to a natural end as in the case of use value—and unlimited because desire for wealth and money and accumulation becomes a desire for a means; there is no end purpose which ultimately terminates or concludes the pursuit. Use value suggests that objects have natural properties and therefore ends. Since currency is a means of exchange and nothing more, it cannot be understood to have a defining characteristic that is in fact an end. In Aristotle's view:

> a polis needs wealth to be *autarkes*, that wealth is part of the good life, that wealth consists of tools or useful things, that these are limited in size and number by the ends they serve, with the consequence that the good life and its constitutive ends set the standard for deciding how much wealth is enough. (Meikle, 1995, p. 45)

By contrast, in societies where money and accumulation are the only goals and ends (Aristotle, trans. 1986), there is no concept of enough.

In that depiction, what is useful no longer presents itself as a limiting factor. If computers had been widely used during Aristotle's time, then people may not have been as driven to acquire the newest item on the market. In today's society, consumers may find themselves in positions where they really do not need new computers, yet will purchase them anyway. The mentality stretches consumer possession to a point where there is more than what can adequately be utilized.

A characteristic of today's consumer mentality is that people seek to acquire well beyond what they can make use of. If wealth and exchange—both characterized and gauged by money—in and of themselves become standards of well-being and satisfaction, there will be no limit and no indication for an individual of what is, in fact, enough. In effect, Aristotle believed that people utilize exchanges mainly to get what they want (Meikle, 1995). When people make the move from what they need into what they want, limits on what they should acquire lose virtually all boundaries. Fulfilling a want is much different than fulfilling a need.

Characteristics of Capitalism

Although wants and needs appear to contrast greatly at face value, they are not always easy for consumers to distinguish. I recently went on a shopping trip and located a jacket that I really wanted. Though I had awareness I did not need this jacket—I have plenty already—the want was so great that I convinced myself I needed it. If I had been in a position where my other jacket had worn out, and I therefore needed this one, I could have justified the purchase by saying I would need a jacket for the winter. As it stood, however, I made the purchase with no such justification.

The overlap and lack of distinction in want versus need is illustrated by "false needs," which is instilled in the consumer through marketing practices that are meant to convince people to buy more than what is actually needed (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990). These allegedly false needs are very difficult to define. Douglas and Isherwood (1996) claimed that "our real needs, most basic and universal, are our physical needs, those we have in common with livestock" (p. 4). Certainly, false needs do not fall into the category of basic necessities.

The question then becomes, do humans only need what is physical or what might be needed by animals? We must consider that "although the ultimate 'goal' of other animals is to live, the ultimate goal of humankind is conditioned by additional evolutionary purposes, as well, which determine us to live well" (Csikszentmihalyi, & Rochberg-Halton, 1981, p. 232). As stated by Sennett and Cobb (1972), "Animals live naturally from day to day without worrying about why they ought to live; men have that worry because of all the actions they take together…their enjoyment of living in more complicated ways than simple survival would demand" (p. 53).

If in fact living well is a goal of humans, then the marketplace can begin to flourish in light of it. With a goal of living well, consumers will be driven to gain more and bigger and better possessions. Living in the most comfortable and best way will be characterized by increased consumption.

Look at the contemporary marketplace: the characteristic of surplus goods clearly represents what our marketplace looks like today—the "American production and marketing techniques (advertising, packaging, branding, fashion, and the like) *and* our eagerness to embrace them…have produced surplus" (Twitchell, 1999, p. 12). The want consumers have for products after the post-Industrial Revolution, juxtaposed by a need for necessary products, encourages marketing practitioners to market products with an eye toward showing us what those products mean (Twitchell, 1996). In fact, as Twitchell (1999) stated, "There are no false needs. Once we are fed, clothed, and sexually functioning, our needs (really wants) are cultural" (p. 38)—suggesting a complication to the want versus need discussion.

Cultural needs might be needs in a manner of speaking, though they do surpass what is needed for survival (animal). For example, if an individual were to have a certain job, it could well necessitate the need for a car, GPS, cell phone, and computer. None of these objects could really be described as a need in the animal sense, though culture has put pressure on the individual to have them to fulfill certain roles; therefore, they are like needs.

Despite what the distinction between needs and cultural needs might be, though, without a true 'need' for many products and services, consumers must be given something else to latch onto that will direct and drive their consumption behaviors. The consumer ‘want’ must be guided by something beyond mere necessity for product or service.

Shedding some light on the subject, Marcuse (1964) explained that the only ones who can really determine what is a true and a false need are the individuals. The problem is that, due to contemporary marketing practices, individuals are not able to process the distinction on their own (Marcuse, 1964). The fact that consumers are, in Marcuse’s (1964) view, unable to choose fully for themselves as long as they are being persuaded means simply that they cannot distinguish for themselves between the real and false needs. The fact that marketing practitioners might encourage false needs for consumers may well feed into the way in which needs become confused—again, the reality is these things may in fact be wants.

Once again we see the issue of the external standard. Marketing practitioners are the ones attempting to grant value to objects, which results in a simple premise: someone else is telling consumers how to ascribe value. For example, “a great deal of the energy we consume goes to provide comfort: more and more elaborate houses, clothes, food, and gadgets. The energy we use still serves ends that mimic basic needs—food, warmth, security, and so on—but now have become addictive habits rather than necessities” (Csikszentmihalyi, & Rochberg-Halton, 1981, p. 229).

Although there may be additional, culturally-sensitive needs beyond animalistic, physical needs—and the origin of these additional needs is up for debate—what is apparent is that people are driven to want things beyond what they need or otherwise are motivated to need things that are necessitated and constructed by culture. The particular distinction is really no distinction at all. What we need to keep in mind is that the idea of a cultural need contradicts Aristotle's ideas on necessity. Since the needs are cultural, they are not according to a fixed nature of a thing, but are rather characterized by custom. Since the supposed needs are determined by culture, they are a matter of convention; they are context-sensitive.

In the above case, as just one example, the bigger and the better version of the thing is thought to fulfill a need, but in reality has more to do with want. Rather than objects and goods being treated as necessities, they are treated as things to acquire. The objects are wanted, despite the fact that consumers might already have enough of what they can realistically make use of.

Take clothing for example. Sennett (1976) claimed that clothing was made for the purpose of covering and warming the body, while clothing made to be seen really is not as concerned with those basic uses. Clothing used in private might be geared toward practical use—and understood that way—but in the public arena clothing also indicates wealth, status, culture, and meaning. With function no longer being the only, or at least primary, concern, what constitutes enough for the consumer is unclear.

If I set out to have the latest styles from Express Men, my consumption would simply not know a boundary. On the one hand, I could approach my need for clothing as one of function, where I set out to be equipped for various weather conditions. On the other hand, I could use Express Men clothing to project an image. If I am projecting an image and trying to look a certain way, I will be more inclined to buy amounts of clothing beyond what I need.

Twitchell (2002) put this issue quite well with his cafeteria metaphor. He described a context in which "you can have as much of it as you can get on your plate," rather than “the idea of a cafeteria [being] that you can have just one of many choices” (Twitchell, 2002, p. 2). If we are to truly grasp this idea that consumers will just load their plates with more and more goods and products to—at least partially—fulfill their desires for what they want rather than only what they need, then we can begin to understand how Aristotle’s use value and exchange value can inform brands in today’s marketplace.

Aristotle sees reciprocity, proportion, and exchange related to amount since exchange in an issue of equation. For Aristotle, things are not commensurable related to their use value, but rather their exchange value; the task becomes determining the amount that could potentially be considered a just exchange (Meikle, 1995). Of course, things remain incommensurable simply because their exchange value fluctuates, and currency is a slight point of departure in the sense that currency can become representative of an amount. Even with quantity and equation, there is no way to determine any kind of fixed exchange value.

Aristotle (trans. 1999) discussed the idea of amount when he addressed currency. He gave an equation:

> Let A, for instance, be a house, B ten minae, C a bed. A is half of B if a house is worth five minae or equal to them; and C, the bed, is a tenth of B. It is clear, then, how many beds are equal to one house—five. This is clearly how exchange was before there was currency; for it does not matter whether a house is exchanged for five beds or for the currency for which five beds are exchanged. (Aristotle, trans. 1999, p. 76)

As discussed previously, if things are incommensurate in terms of use value, currency as a means of exchange becomes a way to gauge exchanges, though it can fluctuate; the means of money becomes a way to measure amount—a conventional way to measure. Of course, this measure of exchange is relative to circumstance, but still provides ways to assess and quantify amounts in exchanges

Today, brands take on a role that is more in line with the exchange value attributed to money than anything else—having to do with issues of trust, durability, and stability. Brands actually have a characteristic similar to currency in the marketplace, in that there must be a kind of agreement on their worth, and their worth can fluctuate. Aristotle did not see a way to define a fair exchange because different use values result in incommensurability. At that point, money can become a way to help negotiate exchanges; brands can, too.

As a starting point for this conversation, Travis (2000) stated that "humans dealing with humans in human ways is called branding" (p. 254), recognizing that communication and human connections to brands are what will be major determinants of their value in exchange. Such characterization is not always looked at positively, considering that objects are not necessarily meant to have human characteristics. In a criticism of marketing and commercial messaging, Hardt (2004) said that "the technologies of human communication suggest immediacy, reproduce comforts of physical and psychological proximity, and claim intimacy" (p. 61). At the same time, the approach is designed to assist in dealing with surplus goods and to differentiate quality.

As an ongoing trend in the marketplace, objects are personified because marketing practitioners want consumers to establish relationships with brands. Should the relationship prove a positive one, the value of the brand becomes even more important. Sennett (2008), for example, discussed a “kind of material consciousness” that transmits objects with human characteristics (p. 135), seeing how people even personify products they own and interact with. This quality can “succeed only if people are willing to believe that objects are invested with attributes of human character; profits for the seller do not indicate why people are so willing to believe” (Sennett, 1976, p. 147). In short, for consumers there is something more.

We must keep in mind that not all brands are designed fully for the consumer. Some companies operate with the intention of branding to other companies (Gylling & Lindberg-Repo, 2006), with the consumer focus being a bit more indirect. Travis (2000) mentioned Intel as an example, since Intel portrayed certain ideals with their product that consumers then expected from computer companies when they assessed quality. It is important to realize, though, that even when businesses brand toward one another, the consumer will still make or break the brand, which is why brands need to value human connection.

The new marketing model, responsive to the needs and characteristics of today’s marketplace, is that of integrated marketing communication (IMC), which is defined as “a process through which companies accelerate returns by aligning communication objectives with corporate goals” (Schultz & Schultz, 2003, p. 3). The IMC model can be understood as a type of brand building, in which organizations attempt to create a unique, distinctive brand for their organization which is marketed to consumers in a consistent way through all facets of communication. Within IMC, brands “pull all…values, functions, promises, and processes into a seamless whole” (Travis, 2000, p. 188), which is extremely important, considering consumers will make all sorts of connections to a company based upon what is communicated through the brand (Keller & Richey, 2006). Brands, quite literally, involve much more than just a function of the commodity.

Perhaps most importantly, “communication is central to a brand because a powerful brand is more likely to be promise-centric rather than product-centric” (Travis, 2000, p. 190). Again we see clearly the role of trust, reputation, and, ultimately, worth. Within the promise centric approach of branding, issues of trust and reputation become paramount, especially considering that consumers will become increasingly comfortable with the brands they like (Travis, 2000). Organizations actually ‘brand’ themselves in addition to their products through aligned communication efforts (Schultz & Schultz, 2003).

DiGiorno Pizza is a great example of how promises are made from brands. A brand of pizza that has commercials stating “it’s not delivery…it’s DiGiorno” is making a promise of quality. The ads around DiGiorno focus on consumers being able to differentiate between delivery pizza, which is good, and store-bought pizza, which is not as good. DiGiorno is promising the consumer that their store-bought pizzas will be every bit as good as delivery pizza, and that consumers will not really know the difference. Consumers can judge the quality of the pizza for themselves by trying it and seeing if DiGiorno makes good on their promise.

Since trust and reputation are significant influences on a brand’s worth, brands are largely dependent upon their ethos in the market. In much the same way that audiences attribute credibility to speakers when they show good character (Aristotle, trans. 1984), so, too, must a brand’s messages convey credibility to consumers through persuasion.

Consumers will critically evaluate a brand's persuasive messages, and come to further evaluate a brand in their interaction with it. Should the promises made by the brands not match up with the interaction, the consumer may begin to distrust the brand.

Interaction is very important. Travis (2000) pointed out that people do not see someone as a "nice guy" simply because he says he is a nice guy; rather, people will make this assessment based on the person's actions (p. 169). A brand must prove itself in a similar manner. Sennett (2008), for instance, claimed that "the attribution of ethical human qualities—honesty, modesty, virtue—into materials does not aim at explanation; its purpose is to heighten our consciousness of the materials themselves and in this way to think about their value" (p. 137). Brands allow consumers access to something beyond the use value of products, inviting them into a world where they understand how to "value objects" in a way that guides thoughts and behaviors toward them (Twitchell, 1996, p. 11). The value of a brand is in large part something beyond just product function, which warrants a look at how brands play an essential role within exchanges in today's marketplace.

If we are to truly understand branding as "the central activity of creating differing values for…commonplace objects and services" (Twitchell, 1996, p. 13), then we must understand branding in terms of a practice. Since the desire for and love of money is unlimited because it is characterized by exchange value—money is a means with no use value or natural property—and if money is unnatural because it is convention, made and defined by humans to gauge commensurability in want-driven situations, we might actually look at brands in the same way.

Branding a product or service is a human practice that is similarly unnatural because it impacts exchange value only. The goal of branding is to make an object more valuable in an exchange. Use value of the branded product can remain completely unaltered in branding; the branding, though, will somehow impact the exchange value. Branding can mostly be conceived of as humans imprinting an unlimited and unnatural exchange value upon something with use value.

Gatorade, for example, has focused a recent campaign on what they call the "G" Series. In fact, many Gatorade commercials now do not even mention the brand name Gatorade, but rather just refer to their drinks as "G." The streamlined initial seems to be intended to make Gatorade come across as fresh and youthful, despite the fact that the Gatorade formula is completely unchanged. What ultimate effect the campaign has on Gatorade sales remains to be seen, but the goal is clearly to revise the Gatorade brand while keeping the product untouched.

Obviously the change from Gatorade is an attempt to make the brand more valuable. Aristotle (trans. 1986), viewing exchange for different purposes, commented that people who concern themselves with wealth became much better at exchange, in order to maximize their profits to the fullest extent. In this spirit, there is similarly profit to be made by branding a product. In a want-driven-society, money-getting as a motivation for marketing practitioners can be skillfully negotiated through branding.

In a manner of speaking, money can create consensus and feelings of equality in exchange because of how it gauges value (Aristotle, trans. 1999). I would argue that in a capitalistic society of surplus, the brand acts as a similar factor of exchange. Think about it like this: "In communities for exchange…reciprocity that is proportionate rather than equal, hold people together; for a city is maintained by proportionate reciprocity" (Aristotle, trans. 1999, 74). A brand can affect how much a consumer is willing to pay; can affect what is considered as proportionate reciprocity. A brand impacts the exchange value of a thing with use value because reciprocity and what is proportionate is redefined—or at least disrupted—by the brand.

Specifically, the unnatural and unlimited human imprint upon things with use value disrupts the notion of exchange value simply because it introduces brands as a component to exchange. The brand is therefore one way that exchanges are redefined outside the realm of quantity, as explained earlier. The "unnaturalness" that factors into exchange value becoming proportionate (Meikle, 1995, p. 15) is skewed even further.

Consumers very strongly respond to the additional push offered by brands. Twitchell (1999) suggested that "things in and of themselves simply do not mean enough" (p. 11). Marketing practitioners, therefore, have the task of creating additional meaning (Twitchell, 1999). Though the actual brand itself may be limited in meaning depending on the object, as use value can characterize a brand and its focus to a consumer, the meanings are what drive the market.

Even more importantly, those meanings almost always need to be specific. As Travis (2000) stated, "A brand that wants to be a little of everything will eventually amount to a lot of nothing" (p. 106). The branding must do something to communicate a particular to the consumer, which we will now touch upon.

Marketing practitioners make numerous attempts to have their brand stand for something niche, while also reaching out to a niche audience. The American Eagle brand has tried to extend its brand to meet these kinds of audiences. While American Eagle is targeted primarily toward male and female teens, perhaps even up to around age 25, Martin and Osa is aimed at an older crowd, Aerie is designed for women, and 77 Kids is geared toward a much younger audience. By creating different brand names, American Eagle has attempted to reach out to specific age demographics, a move which shows the organization's awareness of the target audience for their original brand.

Since each brand named above is part of American Eagle, each one is primarily based in clothing. The clothing, however, takes on additional meaning because of the particular age demographic it seeks. The American Eagle brand is associated with youth culture, fun, college, the beach, and even romance because of the marketing and advertising efforts around the brand. Without these kinds of efforts, American Eagle would just be clothing.

The meaning added to goods is beyond the use value, function, or natural property of the goods, and perhaps appropriately so. Twitchell (2004) said that "what separates us as a modern culture from much of the rest of the world is not that we are able to hold an array of different versions of the same object but that we are able to hold an incredible number of different versions of the same stories" (p. 30). Competitively, "a good marketing plan is the one with a memorable story…while an ineffective one is forgotten" (Twitchell, 2004, p. 4), which is directly related to the fact that western economies have many options to choose from (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990).

As American Eagle looks to further succeed in the marketplace, they will keep their object the same: clothing. In terms of use, consumers only really need to process that American Eagle is clothes. For each offshoot of the brand, however, consumers must hold a slightly different take on the story of what the brand means. Since American Eagle is already a successful and established brand, it stands to reason that the story has been memorable. From there, the marketing practitioners want consumers to expand their understanding of the story.

In the absolute most basic sense, social and cultural meanings of brands manifest themselves because consumers relate to goods through stories (Twitchell, 2004). One key characteristic of Fisher's (1989) work on the narrative paradigm, which applies to groups more than it does individuals, suggested that "humans are essentially storytellers" (p. 64). Humans assess stories they are exposed to through "*narrative probability*, what constitutes a coherent story, and…*narrative fidelity*, whether or not the stories…they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives" (Fisher, 1989, p. 64).

The sentiment that storytelling is representative of how humans make sense of reality is mirrored by Twitchell (2004) when he said that storytelling is central to our society. As mentioned previously, wants and needs are different, and Twitchell's starting point for grasping marketing and consumerism is in relation to wants and surplus. Needs, which are "really wants," are part of our "culture" (Twitchell, 1999, p. 38). The market saw the additional meaning of stories being present in objects (Twitchell, 2004). The stories grants additional meaning objects, which then become central to the value placed in brands.

Twitchell (2004) went as far as to say that branding is fundamentally about giving objects and services stories to accompany them. At its core, branding is really about "storifying things" (Twitchell, 2004, p. 36), where brands are largely considered to be stories that evolve (Travis, 2000). In the IMC model, organizations seek to tell stories through brands, and they seek to tell these stories to consumers over time. Consumers are then free to buy into stories presented from the marketplace at their own discretion. Twitchell (2004) said that marketing—successful marketing—has to do with "making money by storytelling" (p. 4), where the story is a central determinant of brand success and longevity.

Marketing specifically encourages consumers to see "buying stuff as a way to consume meaning" (Twitchell, 1999, p. 75). If consumers are given ways to consume meaning through stories and not just through product or use value, then there is an aspect of the brand that factors into exchange value, yet is not related to natural property of the object. Twitchell (2004) commented that as early as the nineteenth century, branding "became the meaning-making motor of consumerism" (p. 3). The invitation for marketing and advertising to find a place in the modern market is clear within this statement: applying a story to a good can help to encourage greater consumption when there is surplus, and that surplus is not fully reliant on use or necessity. When there is scarce supply, people will seek goods out of necessity; however, utilizing communication and persuasion takes a central role to encourage spending and economic growth in markets characterized by surplus.

The way meaning is generated through marketing practices demonstrates just how necessary advertising, branding, and marketing are in a capitalist system. An economy characterized by "massive surplus" must deal with a specific challenge: needs are taken care of, so consumers must be driven to want things (Twitchell, 2004, p. 5). The use value, or the fixed meaning in an object, is no longer the primary means of marketing; people have enough of what they need. Soros (1998), for example, stated that it is "false" to think that “there is a prevailing belief that economic affairs are subject to irresistible natural laws comparable to the laws of physics” (p. 28). In fact, “instability…may seem capitalism’s only constant” (Sennett, 2006, p. 16). Marketing, then, serves the function of turning wants into perceived needs, where consumers are motivated to want things. Wants are largely unstable in the sense that they can fluctuate and change. Without the rhetorical construction of some form of additional meaning in the products, people might not be as driven to buy more than what they can actually make use of.

The bottom line is that “once the basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing are satisfied for most people,” there is the dilemma of trying to sell the large amount of goods that still exist (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990, p. 20). Thus, there is a dilemma in capitalism, and a dilemma that must be dealt with. Baran and Sweezy (1966) articulated that, when there is surplus, “it can be absorbed in the following ways: (1) it can be consumed, (2) it can be invested, and (3) it can be wasted” (p. 79). With an eye towards consumption of surplus, marketers utilize stories in order to distinguish and make unique an abundance of products through branding, ultimately granting consumers specific access points toward brand identities and meanings in products. The meaning generated through stories therefore has the potential to affect exchange value.

Now of course there are limits to the power of a brand, and branding does not guarantee success or an increase in value within an exchange. In addition to the fact that “ineffective” stories are “forgotten” (Twitchell, 2004, p. 4), meaning that there is only so much room for each story and that stories are critically assessed, there is also the fact that consumers can have either positive or negative impressions of brands (Calkins, 2005). A brand’s meaning, told through a story, does not guarantee positive impressions or positive feelings toward a brand, and negative associations to brands and brand names can actually lessen their perceived value.

Negative feelings toward brands or positive feelings toward other brands can harm a brand's chance of success (Travis, 2000). In short, brands do not always 'work.' Certainly, brands can be used effectively, so they are not burdens; rather, brands should be viewed as opportunities to create and possibly maintain the perceptions of the companies and organizations. Brands and the additional meanings in products are absolutely vital to both culture and the marketplace as they exist today.

Buying things becomes a way for people to consume particular, rhetorically-constructed meanings and stories, and in this way marketing helps consumers channel their consumption and focus on specific goods. Twitchell (1999) stated that "if anything we are not materialistic enough" (p. 38), emphasizing the point that in a market characterized by surplus, people need directions for what they should consume. Marketing does take on a role that drives people toward buying, but this role has to do with competition and the buying of specific goods with particular meanings, as people require guidance in differentiating brands and products. Marketing is vital in encouraging consumption out of want desires, and this is primarily done through showing consumers how to best distinguish among options.

Brands are essential in today's economy, and it was "in the middle of the twentieth century [when] the branding process started to enter the marketplace of cultural values and beliefs" (Twitchell, 2004, p. 3). Echoing this sentiment, Douglas and Isherwood (1996) noted that goods have the capacity to "carry social meanings" (p. 38). As a social meaning-making mode, and as holding a place in culture, brands have the capacity to affect exchange value. In fact, brands can even be a primary determinant in exchange value.

Even so, brands are not the only factor in social meaning-making. When brands are the factor, however, the "connections" are "unstable symbols of impulse and intention" (Sennett, 1976, p. 309). Culture itself can limit a brand's power based upon trends at the time or even perception in the hands of the consumers. As Burke (1969) stated, "The 'celestial'…need not be a very high order of godhead. Any term for supernatural motivation (be it justified or not) would meet the requirements" (p. 215). Keeping with this train of thought, Burke (1969) also described "stylizations of motives belonging to the social hierarchy" (p. 215). What is clear here is that meaning is derived from various applications of life; brands are not the only application.

Even if we are to accept the characteristic ways in which material goods have meanings, we must also acknowledge that both culture and cultural expectations can impact the power brands have in the way they carrying these meanings—specifically, larger meanings ascribed by culture may limit a brand's ability to find its place or carry a prescribed or dictated meaning. The cultural meaning given to brands—or additional or possibly separate meaning placed by culture—shows the way in which brands find their place in culture, but also exposes another dimension of value that fits both within and outside of branding; that of narrative value. Brands, in the meaning they have, will not and cannot exist in an isolated vacuum; rather, they exist within a historical context that is interdependent with culture.

When Gadamer (1988) spoke of the "limited intentionality of meaning within the fundamental continuity of the whole" (p. 217), he articulated a way in which we might understand how rhetorically-constructed meanings function. Gadamer (1988) stated that "a horizon is not a rigid frontier, but something that moves with one and invites one to advance further" (p. 217). By reflecting culture, brands invite consumers into deeper understandings of their culture, while at the same time demonstrating cultural norms and expectations. Brands move with cultural narratives, and can even grow with and adapt to narratives. The tension that brands experience is that they must work with culture in order to find their place in culture, which means there is a point where the horizons meet.

Before discussing more of the specifics of narrative value, however, it is important to look at the way in which brands take on a specific meaning through marketing practices, as well as how values manifest themselves in the marketplace. Within IMC, "A brand that wants to be a little of everything will eventually amount to a lot of nothing" (Travis, 2000, p. 106). What is commonly found is that "narrow brands work best" (Travis, 2000, p. 106). There is a challenge for marketing practitioners, since brands—which rely on culture and targeted messages to generate meaning—for the most part cannot be marketed as everything to everyone. The issue is that the consumption of goods are viewed as a way for people to better understand themselves, so marketers are thus encouraged to focus on the consumer rather than the actual goods in their marketing practices (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990). As described by Schultz and Schultz (2003), "The ultimate end user, customer, or consumer must be at the center" (p. 50) of the marketing.

An additional defining feature of marketing practitioners is that they try to fit their products into an already existing culture (Twitchell, 1996). Rather than creating stories, brands instead tell stories that look to fit within stories that can already be found in culture. Twitchell (2004) emphasized this point when he said that “linking brand stories with other narratives may prove productive in understanding how these microfictions work” (Twitchell, 2004, p. 44). The fictional depiction of brands in this quote is central to the discussion, as brands provide fiction to consumers that consumers can then elect to buy into; the fictional nature of the brand message and brand story illustrates the way that brands function in the marketplace.

Narrow brands—at least, most successful ones—try to tell specific stories with specific meanings to specific consumers; these characteristics ultimately allow consumers to “feel special” (Twitchell, 1996, p. 3). Through marketing efforts, consumers come to “learn what objects mean” (Twitchell, 2002, p. 58). The challenge for marketing practitioners is directly related to how brands strive to target particular audiences and individuals with their stories. Brands must represent and stand for something, and must be narrow in meaning and focus in order to adequately persuade; with these goals, brand messages can then seek to target particular consumers. Marketing practitioners must also understand and work with the cultures they seek to align their brand stories with, as finding a place for a brand story within already existing stories takes the challenge of making a brand effective to task.

What has largely redefined the cultural element of what brands need to communicate is the shift in derived meaning from production to consumption: “in the way we live now, you are not what you make. You are what you consume” (Twitchell, 2002, p. 1). This is a change of pace from a structure in which people valued themselves and others based on what they produced through their work (Sennett, 1998). In the same way that “material possessions carry social meanings” (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996, p.

38), “consuming the right brands” equates to “merging with others of the same lifestyle” (Twitchell, 2002, p. 6). In fact, marketing practitioners can express to consumers how to “consume the proper stuff” (Twitchell, 2002, p. 9). The operation of gathering meaning through consumption is in large part an issue of consuming the right things.

Still, while the marketing practitioner can provide some guidance about what to consume, it is important to consider that consumption itself is the consumer’s decision (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996). Consumers make the choice about whether to buy. Marketing practitioners only generate meaning through marketing messages to a certain extent; “what happens to material objects once they have left the retail outlet and reached the hands of the final purchasers is part of the consumption process” (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996, p. 36). What comprises the supposed proper stuff, then, as well as how meaning and identity are generated through brand consumption, is largely an issue of choosing on the part of the consumer, so consumers themselves also play a key role in being selective about and deciding on what exactly is proper to consume.

After all, “what is ultimately branded in advertising is not objects but consumers” (Twitchell, 1996, p. 110). The “consumer culture” tells consumers that they should “fit in” and not “stand out” (Twitchell, 2002, p. 6), a sentiment that is carried with the brand long after the purchase decision has been made. A narrow and focused brand, through marketing efforts, can tell people what to consume for particular and specified meanings and will do so if the marketing hopes to be successful. In reality, the marketing efforts only assist consumers; consumers still generate meaning through brands on their own. While consumers may “crave objects,” the “advertising, packaging, fashion, and branding” truly tell consumers about the particular meaning of those objects (Twitchell, 1999, p. 11). Consumers then bind their own stories and meanings into the brands by consuming them.

The meaning that characterizes a brand is what alters an object beyond its existence as a product; this is part of what markets and potentially moves the product in a capitalistic society characterized by a surplus of goods. Without a specific, social, and cultural meaning, the brand will likely not work. Take the earlier example Aristotle gave of the Delphic Knife. The knife's failure was in trying to have so many use values and natural properties that it lost its ability to be truly effective in any of those uses.

Arguably, in the contemporary marketplace, a narrow focus would be equally important, but also in terms of carving out an identity for the knife. The 'Delphic,' and what that as a name might mean could potentially boost the exchange value of the knife, even if the uses of the knife are not up to standard. Travis (2000) spoke of roots and shoots, and how it is important that narrow brands not attempt to be things they are not—so multipurpose uses could prove problematic—but brand identity is important, as well, within the equation of exchange.

Certain products can, without issue, be released under the same brand name (Hakenes & Peitz, 2008; Smith, 1992). For instance, Boar's Head is a brand widely known for meats and cheeses. The name Boar's Head, however, is derived from the fact that it started out as a brand of ham. Since it had a reputation of quality meat, the brand was able to market other food, such as cheese, under the same brand name. The potential of this practice is two-fold. On the one hand, if consumers feel an allegiance to a brand, they may be more willing to try additional products that carry the same brand name (Travis, 2000). In addition, the existing brand has an existing image (Oakenfull, Blair, Gelb, & Dacin, 2000), so the product does not have the burden of instituting an altogether new brand.

Derivations of different products under the same name are not always so easily enacted. Some products on the market have become fundamentally the same as their brand names, such as in the cases of Band-Aid and Xerox (Travis, 2000). Band-Aid, for example, is a well-known brand with a very distinctive identity that is considered "unlikely to change" (Travis, 2000, p. 152). Still, Band-Aids can have designs on them, can vary in shape, size, and color, and can even vary slightly in their application—such as in the case with some Band-Aids that have antibiotic ointment contained on their strips. While a brand must identify its 'roots' and become grounded in a specific identity, it can develop its 'shoots' so that it works within that same identity but still branches out.

Just because an object has a variety of uses, however, does not necessarily mean exchange value will be compromised. In fact, marketing might take an informative role that is designed to explain various uses. Often times, brand names are used to classify the products and what they stand for (Kohli & LaBahn, 1997).

Consumers, after all, need direction to better understand the products. Brand names need to be easy to remember and marketing practitioners frequently make brand names applicable to the product if the product is to have a higher chance of success (Kohli & LaBahn, 1997). The benefit of the brand name is that it can invoke certain feelings and associations of the brand itself (Travis, 2000). Mr. Clean, as an example, is meant to be easy to remember, as well as to trigger consumer response that the brand does what its namesake suggests—cleans. Still, Mr. Clean can use its brand namesake to clean more than just floors. Sennett (2008) allowed for this possibility is his idea of the “domain shift,” which “refers to how a tool initially used for one purpose can be applied to another task, or how the principle guiding one practice can be applied to quite another activity” (p. 127). Marketing can at times be used to instruct consumers on use or application of an object, which, though constrained by use value, will not always adversely affect exchange value.

The branding of an object is directly meant to impact exchange value. For this reason, branding can easily compromise exchange value. As discussed earlier, a brand can find trouble without focus. A lack of identity for a brand can result in the brand meaning too much and therefore not finding its niche place in culture. Branding a product successfully often means identifying a specific meaning for the brand. Considering the surplus characteristic of the economy and the fact that consumers are driven by wants, finding narratives that are appropriate for the specific brands and products is extremely important.

Burke’s (1954) idea of recalcitrance is on display here. The recalcitrance of a particular object is found in how there is resistance or tension in how exactly the object can be branded or imbued with culture. Burke (1954) said that “the factor of recalcitrance may force us to alter our original strategy of expression greatly” (p. 255). The product is the concrete object; the brand has the personality (Biel, 1992; Travis, 2000). The personality and idea of the brand are in constant flow (Travis, 2000). A brand alters or at least impacts an otherwise simplistic view of an object, therefore creating a tension in how a consumer might come to understand the now branded object.

In much the same way that “tension” can exist within a metaphor (Ricoeur, 1993, p. 214), so, too, does tension exist in a brand. Ricoeur (1993) touched upon the idea that what makes a metaphor come to life is the "tension" that exists when people try to frame the metaphor within their existing "body [of] knowledge;" the tension is between the "literal" and "metaphorical" implications (p. 214). The tension drives interpretation, as an individual uses existing knowledge and interpretation to derive meaning. The literal in the context of our discussion is the object, and the metaphorical is the brand. The "logic deviation" is what is capable of "redescribing reality" (Ricoeur, 1993, p. 22).

When marketing practitioners seek to alter audience perception of a brand, they must be well aware of constraints. Bitzer (1992) described how persuaders should look at audience expectations as constraints, in order to better appeal to the audience overall. The audience is a clear and specific situational element that must be considered in the playing out of persuasion.

Hypothetically, if Mr. Clean were to change its brand namesake into food products, for example, consumers would feel tension in coming to understand the brand in light of the product. At that point, one of two things would occur. Either the brand would be accepted in light of the product, and would hopefully meet with acceptance or success, or the brand would fail to work in that particular product category.

By projecting meaning and value into objects, marketers are faced with the challenge of being constrained by both culture and use value in determining what the object can stand for. The current culture, the targeted audiences for the brands, and what the objects can actually do are all issues that may impact and influence choices for brand meaning and identity. On the other hand, the "use character of the object" can be "temporarily suspended. It becomes 'stimulating,' one wants to buy it, because it becomes temporarily an unexpected thing; it becomes strange" (Sennett, 1976, p. 144).

In either instance, figuring out what aspects of a brand are most appropriate for a given object is context-sensitive, and, since consumers are ultimately open to make their own purchasing choices, can largely factor into brand perception and interpretation.

Furthermore, we must remember that Twitchell (2004) depicted brands as "microfictions" that should "link [their] brand stories with other narratives" (p. 44). In culture, objects can take on meanings apart from only the ascribed brand stories that might be associated with them. Though brands serve a cultural function due to the stories they tell, culture can also produce meanings and stories in objects in ways that are completely separate from marketing. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) articulated the ways in which objects can represent cultural meanings related to religion, achievements, or relationships, specifically how "a wedding ring on someone's hand, for example, is a sign of attachment, just as a trophy tells of a winner's prowess and the family's pride in displaying it" (p. 20). Taking the argument a step further, the authors described how "television sets both represent one of the most important beliefs in American culture as to how people should spend their time (and money) and are signs of the way Americans invest a significant portion of their daily attention" (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981, p. 20).

Goods can take on characteristics distinct to culture, though these characteristics do not necessarily originate from the marketplace. I would posit that 'narrative value' is a concept worth discussing in order to round out the conversation from Aristotle. Specifically, cultures can ascribe meanings to objects, showing how cultures themselves, even in the absence of marketing, might come to value objects in ways that are not related to use value.

Subject and Chapter Overview

The current study seeks to provide an understanding of the concept of 'narrative value,' an idea that in many ways is discussed in communication scholarship, but is not labeled or explored. By discussing narrative value, I hope to show how narrative value is, in effect, part of exchange value, yet is unique from brands, which are fictional works provided to the consumer by the marketplace. In both cases, the exchange value of an object is impacted in either a positive or a negative way, and there is still a level of context-sensitivity. This is why narrative value will be looked at as a dimension of Aristotle's exchange value, rather than as an independent third value. By utilizing Aristotle's notions of use value and exchange value, the marketplace will be approached in a theoretical way that emphasizes how people place value in objects—value that emerges from culturally bound tradition and value that emerges from marketing practices and consumption.

Central to the argument is the idea that the marketplace impacts exchange value by attempting to give objects branded personalities. Though these personalities can be bought into in ways that are suggestive of culture, they do not create culture but rather reflect it—hence Twitchell's (2004) depiction of branding and marketing as fictional. This is the primary differentiation in narrative value that affects exchange value and branding that affects exchange value.

Starting with this chapter, I begin to give the foundation for how use value and exchange value, as set forth by Aristotle, are applicable ideas in understanding how the contemporary marketplace works, especially as it relates to branding. The practice of branding itself is, after all, enacted in hopes of increasing the value of the product in an exchange. Since the use value of a thing remains unchanged in the branding process, branding relies on culture, status, and stories to create images and meanings around products that otherwise would be valued primarily in the use they fulfill. By discussing Fisher's ideas on the narrative paradigm as well as Twitchell's views on marketing and consumption, I hope to evaluate how meaning can be constructed around products and other objects.

Given how powerful marketing and branding practices are today, I will use the second chapter to focus on integrated marketing communication, a business/communication model that taps into consumers and how they perceive brands in ways that are much more powerful than previously devised. I will use the definition of integrated marketing communication by Schultz and Schultz to explain IMC, while also touching upon ideas from Travis, Sherry, and Hardt to show how powerful marketing has become in our culture. By doing this, I hope to emphasize how central brands are to how consumers attribute exchange value to things, as well as to how consumers engage the marketplace

In chapter three I will explore Aristotle's ideas of use value and exchange value with more depth. Specifically, I will argue how both use value and exchange value have an effect on demand. I will touch upon some discussion from Simmel, who spoke of money, which has a specific and unique place within understanding exchange value. The end goal of the chapter will be to introduce the way that the marketplace blurs the distinction of want and need, and that this is done through communication.

With Twitchell and Simmel again central to the conversation, the fourth chapter will focus on just that—wants versus needs. By looking at literature that focuses on the roles of branding and marketing today, I will discuss both positive and negative assessments of advertising, branding, and marketing. The purpose of this chapter will be to explain how the market has become a primary institution for how people make sense of their lives.

For the fifth—and final—chapter, I will look at communication literature that discusses past and current ways that cultures value objects for the stories they tell and what they represent. Discussion from Fisher, Twitchell, Douglas and Isherwood, and Leiss, Kline, and Jhally will serve to explore the ways that culture can ascribe and construct meaning in objects--operating independently from the marketplace. My purpose for the chapter will be to define how narrative value has a presence in the way we look at and understand things. I will argue that narrative value, found within things, is different than brands for the reasons that culture can be created in objects—rooted in tradition—and there is a distinction between valuing and pricing; that there is a value that we put into things that cannot be measured by price.

By assessing use value, exchange value, brands, money, culture, and narrative, I will conclude with ideas from Aristotle as well as how narrative value might be viewed as a component of exchange value. Cultural indicators, as well as cultural origins for objects, will be at the root of this discussion. The end goal for the study will be to showcase how we can think about exchange value within a context of items that have cultural significance, thus further explaining a dimension of Aristotle's exchange value.

Chapter Two: IMC and the Marketplace

Branding appears to be a key factor in marketing today, as people, objects, and services are branded for the purpose of maximizing marketing efforts. Branding practices are largely geared toward making objects visible and specific in the minds of consumers, which is important considering the struggle marketers have in seeking recognition for the things they market. A result of this emphasis on branding is a move and desire in the marketplace that focuses on increasing the value of things beyond what the things might have if they were otherwise not branded.

What is quite clear in looking at the marketplace today is that brands are treated as a necessary way to draw in and appeal to consumers. Brands were not always so prevalent, and various forms of marketing have both been developed and made obsolete leading toward a focus on branding. In order to better understand how these shifts took place, as well as why brands are so important to consumers today, we need to look at why marketers have largely changed their opinions about the directions their marketing should take.

Current Trends in the Marketplace

The marketplace today is a curious entity; obviously, the marketplace looks different than it did years ago. Today's marketplace is ever- shifting and evolving. Missions and strong values are necessary characteristics for strong businesses and brands; missions and values must also be able to withstand the test of time and change (Collins, 2001). Without the ability to adapt, marketing practitioners may find themselves having difficulty in marketing products and appealing to consumers. At the very least, not keeping up with trends or failing to maintain a consistent mission even through changes in leadership can easily result in an organization's failure (Collins, 2001).

The major turn the marketplace saw was a direct result of mass production, which meant that goods could be produced cheaply (Ewen, 2001). There was a shift in the way retailers attempted even to allow for an experience in shopping itself, so that consumers could come to form feelings and associations with their purchases (Sennett, 1976). At all points for the consumer, marketers were shaping a new model and a new approach.

Characterized as a market where there are fluctuating prices, both marketers and consumers go to great lengths to manipulate price points and values (Sennett, 1976). As a result, the market is in constant flux and change. Some of the changes that have resulted are needed to fully grasp the current state of the market. The central workings of the marketplace, therefore, are the focus of discussion in this work.

Weiner (2006) identified three key issues that have led to significant changes in the marketplace and marketing practices. These issues have been the main determinants in marketers rethinking their previously utilized strategies. First, standard business and marketing models are weakening (Weiner, 2006), primarily in terms of how organizations structure their communication. Traditional business models that see members of organizations working independently no longer yield the desired results, as consumers are becoming more savvy and demanding than ever before.

Second, brand loyalty is less likely to occur now than ever before (Weiner, 2006), meaning that gaining consumer attention and business is a much more competitive endeavor than ever before. The decline in brand loyalty is due to the fact that consumers are more willing to shop around for quality, and price is becoming an increasing concern among consumers who are more likely to watch their budgets now (Weiner, 2006). Consumers are no longer as willing to stay within the confines of their chosen brands, and now are more likely to seek out quality and better prices to the detriment of brand loyalty.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, people are cynical of large corporations today (Weiner, 2006). Consumers are more likely to embrace organizations with ties to the local community, as well as ties to their missions, rather than large corporations that only focus on money and may engage in more questionable practices. While the cynicism consumers feel might not necessarily win out over price, there is still an opportunity for different kinds of organizations to take hold if they can match or compete with prices in large corporations. With these three ingredients, a new practice has emerged that has dramatically changed the marketing landscape.

Put simply, marketing is now about integration (Shiffman, 2008), and that means a change in focus. Integrated Marketing Communication, a marketing practice abbreviated as IMC, is defined by Schultz and Schultz (2003) as "a process through which companies accelerate returns by aligning communication objectives with corporate goals" (p. 3). With an emphasis on communication, IMC is characterized by the way in which organizations "'align'" their efforts to both reach consumers and attain their goals. We must remember, too, that IMC is thought to be both internal and external coordination, so it is not fully exclusive to marketing alone (Schultz & Schultz, 2003).

Alignment really is the key difference in the shift in marketing approach. In the past, businesses were doing well, or at least well enough, and so therefore did not worry about integration or coordination (Schultz & Schultz, 2003). In other words, the risk was not necessarily worth taking. With changes in consumer behavior and perception, however, businesses felt more inclined to take risks, so they would not lose business to competitors. The practice of IMC is reactive to today's market, in which brands, technology growth, and the need to appeal to various cultures through marketing (Schultz & Schultz, 2003) are the keys to success. IMC contradicts the former top-down business model, in which various constituents of an organization—promotions, public relations, advertising, etc.—are not aligned and function in a more independent way.

There are clear outcomes to a market driven by IMC practices. The companies that have strong missions endure (Collins & Porras, 1997) simply because they utilize IMC to articulate their missions. At all points of contact with an organization's communication, then, the mission is both articulated and reinforced. Collins and Porras (1997) claimed this attachment to mission as virtually "cult-like" in quality (p. 123) because of the way businesses embrace and buy into their ideals. For this reason, profit can also no longer be the central driver of a successful business (Collins & Porras, 1997), although attention must be given to making money for the well-being of the business.

Perhaps the most important outcome is in the way that each marketing effort is directed toward establishing and building the organization as a whole. In the most basic sense, one of the IMC constituents, namely advertising, is designed to direct consumer attention toward particular things (Williams, 1980). This is where the opportunity to showcase mission really applies.

Apple, for example, has shown itself to meet these criteria, and has established a following in competition with PC. By integrating various forms of technology to work well together, Apple has utilized a kind of appeal that focuses one brand idea around numerous products. While Apple might have a goal of profit, they do not establish their brand around this goal, nor do they draw attention to it when dealing with consumers. Instead, Apple paints itself as being young and hip, as opposed to old and stuffy, an appeal clearly designed to remove Apple from just the technology. This is evident in Mac versus PC commercials, where Apple uses advertising to differentiate themselves from the older, more outdated PC—or at least, Apple would want consumers to believe that.

The above example is not meant to suggest that advertising an idea is an easy process where marketers can simply show themselves in light of competitors. In the face of a changing market, advertising has been looked at in much more complex terms. Despite being one of the more costly aspects of IMC, advertising has been viewed largely as a required part of capitalism and the best way to appeal to and gain consumers (Ewen 2001), especially because of the widespread presence it has. Travis (2000) described advertising as "nothing more than a means for you to control your communication with customers" (p. 168). Steel (1998) described advertising as "a simple form of communication, nothing more and nothing less…" (p. 26). In both cases, communication is central, and advertising is clearly depicted as a way to mediate communication so that it bests reflects the brand and organization. For the purposes of IMC, however, these definitions do not necessarily demonstrate an integrated approach.

Since IMC is primarily driven by coordination, communication efforts must be consistent. A brand that is indicative of an integrated approach is not dependent on advertising, nor is advertising insulated from other facets of communication. IMC is much more comprehensive.

Twitchell (1996) defined advertising in a way that is very much in line with an IMC mentality: “advertising is simply one of a number of attempts to load objects with meaning” (p. 13). Though this definition does not negate the importance of advertising’s role, nor does it negate the power of communication in marketing, it does make clear that advertising exists as just a piece of the puzzle in an integrated communication model; advertising is part of what gives meaning to objects, yet it is not the only thing. What is essential in this definition is Twitchell’s (1996) willingness to address the severe limitation of advertising’s power in the overall scope of marketing. While it is important that advertising allows goods to be rooted in “fantasy” (Ewen, 2001, p. 210), IMC as a practice looks to work within the confines of this framework and align all communicative efforts of an organization.

The serious point of contention is evident in how the marketing is actually viewed. As Steel (2005) said, “The ascendancy of simplicity over complexity is evident in almost every form of human endeavor, although strangely people’s perceptions are almost exactly the opposite” (p. 151). In short, just because a message is simple does not mean that an audience’s feeling or interpretation of it is necessarily quite as simple. Central to this quote is the idea that audiences will take time and effort in understanding even what appears to be the simplest in advertising (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990). Since audience consideration is so important in marketing, many marketers focus on contexts rather than just what they aim to sell, a move that makes consumers, and not just products, vital to the selling process (Postman, 1992). In fact, getting input from consumers themselves is a significant part of IMC (Schultz & Schultz, 2003), an important sentiment considering the fact that IMC looks to articulate a clear mission.

A strong organization must be in constant conversation with consumers, both current and potential (Schultz & Schultz, 2003). The approach is representative of integration, where a move away from the four Ps of "product, price, place, and promotion" (Schultz & Schultz, 2003, p. 4) was indicative of competition requiring businesses to think differently (Schultz & Schultz, 2003). The challenge: construct marketing in such a way that it most effectively reaches and impacts the consumer.

The largest characteristic of the move to the IMC model in the marketplace is likely in this approach toward the consumer. Schultz and Schultz (2003) claimed that an integrative marketing approach hinges on consumer and customer emphasis. This mentality differs from the existing business model, in the sense that the product was once the focus—now, the consumer is. After all, strategies that put the consumer as the central piece of the puzzle must identify a target audience that will be the best to reach (Fortini-Campbell, 2003). Bernays (1928) believed this hinged on a strong understanding of psychology.

Certainly, a goal with this kind of marketing is to get into the consumer's head more than ever before. When thinking again about Apple, they will make sure to showcase the quality of their Mac computers over PCs—for example, they make sure to express the lesser possibility of computer viruses in Macs versus PCs—but they do not have the product as the central focus. Their target market is clearly college-age students who they are marketing an identity to.

Mac is then able to construct an identity of youth culture around the use of its brand. In a most telling statement, Postman (1992) commented that many advertisements are going to direct their persuasive efforts and messages toward characteristics of the consumers rather than characteristics of the products. This is not to suggest that organizations ignore other publics they are responsible for, but they must be the most attentive to consumers, who are after all the ones who allow business to be profitable (Schultz & Schultz, 2003). By emphasizing characteristics of the consumer specifically, consumers become—in a way—confused, because who they are is blurred with marketing messages (Marcuse, 1964). The consumer becomes synonymous with the marketing message, which means marketers can more freely tell consumers what they want and for what reason. Somewhere within marketing practices, consumer perception and interpretation become blended with what the marketing aims to communicate.

At face value, the strategy sounds negative and questionable. There are however, some positive outcomes to competing for consumers while also gearing marketing toward them. By placing consumers at the forefront, organizations strive to be their best and do their best in a variety of categories (Schultz & Schultz, 2003). In turn, this drives competition, which can lead to better quality and a desire for longevity. The idea of building the best relationship with the consumer through IMC manifests itself in a particular way: it is a form of brand building, and brands are dependent on positive relationships.

The Development of Brands

Brands have come a long way from being what the term means “literally,” which is “something stuck in a fire” (Twitchell, 2004, p. 17). Branding, “as a verb…describes the process of tempering by heat. As a noun, a brand is the result of being brazened” (Twitchell, 2004, p. 17). Although we may not think of brands primarily in this way today, there are some similarities to brands currently in the marketplace.

Brands were created initially with an eye toward ongoing success and stability for the company—seen as building a relationship over time (Schultz & Schultz, 2003). Put simply, brands are evident in the marketplace because marketers still make objects unique by labeling and branding them (Sennett, 2008). Sennett (2008) described markings on pottery and how they can actually add worth. For example, a logo added to a generic item, such as in the case of the McDonald's arches added to a hamburger wrapper, might actually make the burgers more valuable than their substance otherwise. For consumers, brands in this guise can also provide a point of distinction for products that might otherwise be lacking in such distinction.

Brands and logos can obviously be highlighted through advertising, as discussed previously. In order to understand both brands and brand building in depth, however, we need to look at what exactly the full integrated approach involves. Razeghi and Calder (2003) put this into clear terms when they said that all messaging and interaction a consumer has with a brand needs to be consistent, so the brand can be the strongest it can be. In other words, the brand is articulated to the consumer through various aspects of communication and, ultimately, in how the consumer comes to experience and interact with the brand.

The consistent portrayal of the brand brings us back to the original conversation about IMC, where alignment is a defining feature. According to Travis (2000), "A brand that practices integrated marketing pulls all its values, functions, promises, and processes into a seamless whole" (p. 188). As an example, Toyota handled a recent crisis event by actually turning to advertising and marketing shortly after working to correct the situation. They expressed in commercial messages the strength of their company, what they did to correct the mistake, and how they hope to hold consumer trust going into the future. Though subtle, Toyota was making sure their public relations efforts matched those of their advertising—a consistent and value-based depiction of the brand.

In many ways, brands are central motivators that impact the marketing of products today. Leiss, Kline, and Jhally (1990) stated that a distinction of developed capitalistic societies is simply the large amount of things that are readily available for purchase. As a necessity of dealing with this large amount, marketing focuses on showcasing products as things that consumers need and should have in order to fulfill something in their lives (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990). After all, without such a focus, the sheer amount of goods may not be consumed.

As a practice, branding became an important factor largely emerging in the 1950s because companies focused their energy on building and expanding on products already on the market—rather than creating all new ones—so brands were needed as a way of making those products unique (Schultz & Schultz, 2003). Rather than starting from scratch and creating all new products, companies became much more inclined to adjust products. Without the crutch allowed by the brand, there would be little, if any, distinction.

A Consumer Focus

The materialistic nature of humans—that is, of consumers—is what is tapped into in the way the market functions. In a context where products can be highly similar, and where there are too many goods to go around, brands are granted the opportunity to take hold. The branding of the variety of available products is what helps consumers make decisions. Brands will have a difficult time thriving, however, if they only market the product and not the consumer. Not surprisingly, then, the hallmark of a brand is not so much related to its quality per se, but rather how it makes you "feel" in an "emotional" way (Travis, 2000, p. 10).

Considering the variety of product choices that consumers contend with, and considering how emotional connection can be a factor in brand selection, "what sets American culture of the late twentieth century apart is not avarice, but a surfeit of machine-made things. What is clear is that most of these things in and of themselves simply do not mean enough" (Twitchell, 1999, p. 12). Again, brands will likely have difficulty on the market if they are not distinct and different from other brands offered. The underlying concept here is that if a product fails to establish an emotional connection with consumers, it will fail to become a brand and remain just a product (Travis, 2000). Without an emotional connection, brands simply do not have the identity that propels them into a greater position in a competitive market.

Once an emotional connection is established within a brand, the "goods have meanings. [The] goods convey meanings" (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990, p. 308). Unmistakably, practitioners have gone to great lengths to make sure products have such meanings (Twitchell, 1999). Meaning acts as a way to make products unique—through marketing and branding practices. Shiffman (2008) stated that brands are a way of isolating one product from another; put simply, marketing is used to help distinguish products. Brand markers such as "names, descriptions, symbols, logos, sounds, colors, smells, packaging, straplines or taglines, [and] advertising" (Schultz & Schultz, 2003, p. 301) can all be copyrighted as parts of a brand. As a direct result, the market becomes a place of choice, difference, and identity, all key features considering consumers have various choices and options at their disposal. With brand loyalty being such a sought-after and rare occurrence in today's marketplace (Weiner, 2006), these three characteristics are needed virtually without exception.

Through intellectual property, brands can take on such a life that makes them unique, while also creating an identity that other brands cannot copy; in reality, brands are unique components to products (Twitchell, 2004). Once the brand is established and identifiable, the brand becomes "a differentiator, a promise, a license to charge a premium" (Sherry, 2005, p. 41). Brands undoubtedly have power in drawing in consumers. Still, it is likely the saturation and constant bombardment of messages that has etched out the contemporary marketplace and set the stage for practitioners.

Twitchell (1996) pointed out that today's market sees oversaturation of commercial messages to the point that almost every facet of life contains some form of advertisement. Many consumers feel as though advertising and marketing have become invasive, getting to a point where avoiding advertising is almost impossible. The fact is that marketers are constantly struggling to produce distinct and well-received brands in an effort to reach and appeal to that all-important end user known as the consumer. There is a huge challenge in reaching consumers, something that drives marketing practitioners to make extra effort. Philport and Arbittier (1997), for example, claimed that successful brands are often innovative in their advertising communication. Gaining consumer attention is at a premium, and this means using nontraditional space and making sure consumers do come into contact with messages.

What becomes particularly challenging for marketing practitioners, especially if consumers begin to feel negatively toward the brand, is how brands can be allencompassing pictures for consumers. As Travis (2000) stated, "*Your brand is not part of your business. It is your business*" (p. 4). As a fairly recent trend, brands have become very representative of the organizations they are attributed to (Hankinson, 2007). Strictly speaking, brands are becoming increasingly synonymous with the organizations themselves—in terms of trust, reliability, personality, credibility, and even reputation—all of which can be easily attributed from the brand directly to the organization by the consumer. The prior example of Toyota is a strong indicator of this, because, as an organization, some of their initial and continued efforts after the crisis were designed around protecting the brand.

Ellul (trans. 1965) stated that various methods of propaganda are needed to show what an organization stands for. Truer words cannot be said, especially given that communication will be taken by consumers as indicative of the organization whether that is the intention or not. For this reason, consumer perceptions of organizations are very much in line with perceptions and experiences with the brand, and are largely—if not totally—inseparable from the organization itself.

A commonly held belief is that the "the intangible" qualities of corporations today are often more valuable than physical and tangible resources a corporation might have (Travis, 2000, p. 7). As an asset, the brand and its recognition can actually outweigh the physical assets of an organization, which is why the brand must be protected and treated with the same care as the organization. Travis (2000) stated that "Coke's fixed assets are worth something like $7 billion, but according to one consulting firm, its brand value is worth $84 billion" (p. 4).

Coke would not be alone in this valuation. When consumers buy products, they are also buying brands. As products alone, many common objects carry with them no distinct or exciting properties; brands, however, serve to correct this issue (Gossage, 1967). Since brands are the exciting and interesting part of products, they become very valuable. It would be similar in buying a brand out; buying a building would likely be nowhere near as valuable—monetary or otherwise—as owning the brand name and rights.

After all, organizations function by producing and marketing meaning, not just product (Twitchell, 1999). Of course, if we understand this manufacturing to impact brand identity and consumer choice in the marketplace, we must also understand how that impact occurs and how it eventually comes to fruition. The meaning produced by marketing efforts can actually help consumers when confronted with choice, an attitude toward marketing that seems in contrast with its more traditional criticism.

Taking a pro-marketing stance, Twitchell (1999) stated that "if we craved objects *and* knew what they meant, there would be no signifying systems like advertising, packaging, fashion, and branding to get in the way. We would gather, use, toss out, or hoard based on some *inner* sense of value" (p. 11). Various aspects of IMC can actually aid consumers in discriminating when it comes to their consumption habits; from this point of view, without marketing, consumers could easily get lost.

At the same time, mass communication by way of marketing may not be the answer—or, it could well be a flawed answer. Peters (1999) emphasized the way mass communication actually "fails to communicate" (p. 267). The necessary component of two-way communication falls at the hands of technology when disseminated to the masses. The main concern is the way that marketing appears to create community, despite the fact that “no real community endures without touch” (Peters, 1999, p. 268), and community really is about being *with* one another (Buber, trans. 1947), something marketing fails to do. Engagement with other humans and engagement in community hinges on levels of “connection” and “relation” (Buber, trans. 1992, p. 61), which superficial connections cannot really initiate. In this view, there is worry over the way marketing is superficial despite messages trying to be to the contrary; in another way, the infiltration of mass messaging is geared toward leading individuals in a necessary way.

As Leiss, Kline, and Jhally (1990) stated, “The ability to transmit live visual representations of group action into domains of private life (especially the home) will offer guidance to people on how to integrate these particular commercial messages about goods into general patterns of behaviour” (p. 286). Whereas there is a common belief that advertising does, in fact, manipulate consumers toward purchasing more than they otherwise might (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990), proponents of marketing such as Twitchell (1999) believed that “if anything we are not materialistic enough” (p. 38). Primarily, this has to do with the way that people need guidance (Bernays, 1928), and how marketing has the potential to actually provide it.

More specifically, Twitchell (1996) meant that “first, we don’t know what to gather and, second, we like to trade what we have gathered. Third, we need to know how to value objects that have little practical use” (p. 11). In this train of thought, marketing is something that channels and hones our materialistic, consumer nature, as opposed to adding to it. Marketing gives a little bit of a nudge to consumers from this perspective, rather than completely dominating their thought processes altogether.

The idea of consumers as “not materialistic enough” stems from “a failure in social meanings, values, and ideals” (Williams, 1980, p. 185), where such things can be applied at will to consumer goods. Actually, if consumers were driven to consumption on their own, advertising would likely have very little use (Williams, 1980); however, consumers will not necessarily consume without some form of assistance. Regardless of the stance toward marketing’s actual effects, though, it is clear that there are some kinds of effects from the marketing. These effects may not be isolated in the way we normally think of them, either. While we may be quick to think that marketing serves an individual and specific brand at a given point in time, the reality is that advertising generally serves the economy as a whole (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990).

Leiss, Kline, and Jhally (1990) spoke to this issue, claiming that marketers and advertisers actually utilize culture in order to market to consumers. By fusing brand identity and culture, advertising itself “has little to do with the movement of specific goods” (Twitchell, 1999, p. 74). A strength of advertising is its ability to help people to recall the brands when applicable, which is a really important component (Ehrenberg, Barnard, Kennedy, & Bloom, 2002). In this way, “rather like religion, which has little to do with the actual delivery of salvation in the next world but everything to do with the ordering of life in this world, so commercialism in all its manifold forms has little to do with material objects per se, but everything to do with how we perceive them” (Twitchell, 1999, p. 74). The perception, though, might be applied to numerous products and brands, as opposed to just one brand at one particular point in time.

Again, within IMC, consumers, not products, are the focus of marketing (Twitchell, 1999). As previously mentioned, Sennett (2008) depicted brands as essentially placing markers on products. Ironically, the result of this action is that brands also have the capacity to personally mark consumers in a way that is similar to how cattle were branded with branding irons. The brands become identifiable through the people who consume them. In large part, marketing attempts to reach individual consumers by finding a place within culture; by appealing to who the consumers are and who they understand themselves to be. If a marketer chooses only to focus on product, the target audience can also get lost.

Travis (2000) articulated that brands trying to function without unique identities and personalities will find they cannot stand for much. Put simply, brands more general and universal in their appeals will likely struggle. Specific appeals of brands are referred to as "root stories," and have to do with being consistent in their "emotional stories" (Twitchell, 2004, p. 44). Rather than try to form brand identities meant to be everything to all audiences, marketers would be well-advised to have their brands stand for something to specific members of that audience. The narrow and unique identity is key. As consumers, "we like being told that 'You deserve a break today,' 'You, you're the one,' and that 'You are special to us,' although we may know it's not true" (Twitchell, 1996, p. 3).

Such approaches are likely why advertising and marketing have been perceived as a set of tricks, which is how Ellul (trans. 1965) characterized propaganda. By appealing to target audiences through focused messaging, marketing strives to reach both large audience and singular individuals at the same time (Ellul, trans. 1965). Tailored messages that make consumers feel good are designed to connect the brand to the consumer on a personal level. In fact, as marketing practitioners attempt to appeal to people's wants more and more, individualized messages are becoming more prevalent and mass audience messages are starting to disappear (Jarvis, 2009). The stronger the link to the consumer, the better and more developed the relationship with the brand.

Marketers want specific consumers to clearly and consistently understand what their brands mean. This is because consumers get ideas in their minds about what a brand is, and they do not like those ideas being challenged or disrupted (Travis, 2000). A good indication of this is when Pizza Hut attempted to market pasta, showcasing the name Pasta Hut in their commercials—not to mention on the sides of buildings in those commercials. Consumers began to believe that Pizza Hut was now Pasta Hut, which caused serious confusion.

In some ways, consumer attachment to brands pigeonholes a brand into being something in particular, and remaining so. Ultimately, this can result in brands having difficulty branching out and changing or trying to be something else. Accordingly, Travis (2000) depicted brands as being able to establish "new shoots from existing roots" (p. 204), in which they can be a little innovative and flexible, but he also believed brands to generally have a tough time in creating new roots—in other words, brands would have a tough time altering or changing their foundations. Understanding why brands would be hard-pressed to establish new roots is not all that complicated. When marketers give consumers a clear and consistent view of brands, consumers have a go-to for their purchases, which is beneficial since the brand becomes a way for consumers to avoid constant shopping around with floods of options (Travis, 2000). Without a consistent view of a brand, consumers may feel the go-to feeling they have with trusted brands is disrupted.

As a way of better understanding how brands can be consistent in their appeals, we must grasp the idea that often times successful brands make specific promises and emphasize those promises (Travis, 2000). There are actually "simple promises of attractiveness and reputation if particular products are used" (Williams, 1980, p. 179). Again, the consumer, not the product, will take center stage. Consumers, after all, need to feel trust (Jarvis, 2009). The brand makes promises to consumers about what it is and what it can accomplish; in turn, consumers will hopefully come to trust the increasingly established brand. Of course, the promise of brand quality hinges on actually following through, and the brand is always under scrutiny and interpretation (Travis, 2000).

After appealing to consumers through individualized attention and consistent messaging, advertising serves as a reminder to consumers about why they made their purchase decisions (Twitchell, 1996). While initially making a promise to consumers through marketing, the brand can use subsequent marketing to reach out to consumers in order to convince them of their correct decision—hopefully—after they choose to buy it. The point is "a brand starts and ends with a promise—a promise that cannot be broken without some kind of penalty. Most people will forgive a mistake, but most people are also too smart to forgive a con" (Travis, 2000, p. 231). For these reasons, brands should be communicated in ways that are consistent with the brand itself (Travis, 2000; Tsai, 2007). In fact, Travis (2000) even went as far as to say that the most telling aspect of a brand's reputation is found in how consumers make excuses for brands.

We must remember that those who are exposed to persuasive messaging are deemed to be the individuals who make judgmental calls on the persuasion and the rhetoric (Aristotle, trans. 1984). Audience members are critics of both character and purpose (Aristotle, trans. 1984). Character and credibility are extremely important in any rhetorical act (Aristotle, trans. 1984). The view of the persuader in the minds of the audience is instrumental in the effectiveness of the persuasion (Aristotle, trans. 1984). Aristotle (trans. 1984) recommended that persuaders encourage certain associations and relationships with the audience so as to allow for a more positive outlook of the persuader. The same holds true for audience members assessing the messages of a brand.

Marketing practitioners would be well advised to look at consumers as "mediators of change" (Bitzer, 1992, p. 7). Knowing which consumers and audiences are best suited for certain brands and products is of the utmost importance. The consumers are the ones, after all, who determine brand success.

Travis (2000) commented that marketing practitioners can easily become out of touch with what is trendy or popular. Since trends and popularity are essential for a marketing practitioner to understand—especially when releasing new brands and products—often times marketing practitioners will conduct observations, surveys, interviews, and focus groups in order to better understand and relate to the consumer. The goal is to create that sought-after positive relationship.

If consumers are happy with a brand, they will hopefully become faithful to it (Sirgy & Lee, 2008; Travis, 2000). In fact, consumers might even go as far as to excuse poor product performance as irregular simply because the brand is viewed as high quality (Travis, 2000). On the other hand, a broken promise carries with it the capacity to do major damage to a brand, and therefore brands are highly susceptible to negative assessments of credibility. Such determinations are found in actual interactions consumers have with the brand; these interactions are a basis for processing brand attributes (Davis, 2005; Hankinson, 2007, Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Quite simply, a negative experience from a consumer could mean a negative perception. In these kinds of instances, proponents of IMC believe advertising's power is limited, and that advertising cannot be used to conceal a brand (Travis, 2000). In fact, strong efforts made in advertising are sharply contrasted by successful brands [such as Starbucks] that do little to no advertising at all (Travis, 2000).

Regardless of the specifics of medium and message, the brand relationship rules. As stated by Morris (1997), "In business, as in every other facet of life, relationships rule the world. A relationship built on falsehood is like a house built on sand; one built on truth is like a fortress anchored in rock" (p. 32). While brand promises can be highly effective, such as in the case of W. B. Mason telling consumers they will deliver items by 5 pm if they are ordered by 11:30 am, promises can also be extremely negative if they are not carried out. Since brands seek to establish relationships with consumers over time, they can be hurt by negative consumer experience.

The relational aspect is similar to how someone might view another person in an interpersonal relationship. A broken promise can shatter otherwise positive consumer perception of a brand in much the same way an interpersonal relationship might be affected by deceit. For example, Steel (2005) claimed that "the aim of the best advertising research is to embrace consumers; reach a deeper level of understanding of the way they think, feel, and behave; and then use those observations and discoveries to kick start the creative process and begin to build a relationship with them through the advertising itself" (p. 105). If immediate purchase was the goal of the advertising, a promotion of the relational aspect would not be as important.

In fact, many successful brands are those that attempt to mimic and copy experiences that consumers might get from other relationships in their lives (Hardt, 2004) The goal is to have repeat business with consumers who feel good about the brand. Reflecting on just such a notion, Sternthal and Lee (2005) discussed how “short-term memory store has a limited capacity—it can only hold a limited amount of information for a short period of time” (p. 130). This is juxtaposed with the way that “with sufficient elaboration or repetition, the information in the short-term store will be transferred to the long-term store” (Sternthal & Lee, 2005, p. 130). Advertising works especially well with repetition, and utilizes messages in just such a way.

Advertising finds strength in giving information and in being memorable. My experience teaching a course in advertising showed me, among other things, that students find Subway’s $5 foot long sub commercials to be extremely annoying due to the jingle. At the same time, however, Subway’s commercials were easily recognized and remembered among the students, and the students were readily able to identify what Subway was selling and for what price. The advertising had created a solid recall experience for the students.

Again, though, IMC recognizes that each component of the marketing has only a certain degree of strength. Advertising cannot be the only facet of an IMC approach that looks to instill consistent messaging in the consumer psyche. In fact, as much as marketing practitioners might try to establish brand relationships similarly to actual interpersonal relationships, interpersonal relationships can never be fully replaced.

In reality, interpersonal relationships have the capacity to even further hinder or affect marketing. Marketing and advertising weaken in strength the more consumers spread word-of-mouth (Jarvis, 2009). Forming positive relationships is of the utmost importance, especially in an era where word-of-mouth can be spread in more ways than ever before, which grants even greater power to consumers (Schultz & Schultz, 2003). We clearly see in today's marketplace the importance of brands having contact with the consumer before purchase, during purchase, and after in an attempt to create a reputation and relationship—largely through promises. Since consumers will likely spread positive and negative experiences with brands and products, kept promises become all the more important if a brand hopes to be successful.

Once again, it is clear that consumers are, and must be, at the heart of the brand messaging. The overall view of the brand suggests that "it's what…symbols mean and the feelings they engender that makes the value of the brand" (Travis, 2000, p. 4). The brand, dissected, is a meaning; a symbol. The brand stands as something apart from the product. In a very telling statement, Travis (2000) claimed that "humans dealing with humans in human ways is called branding" (p. 254). Though Travis (2000) did not elaborate with too much detail on this idea, the apparent position is that humans brand things and, in turn, humans connect with brands. Since there are visuals and other indicators at play in public life (Habermas, trans. 1989), consumers are given an entry point through which to establish themselves within the context of their chosen brands.

Branding as a practice allows consumers to readily identify certain products over others; it is easy to make a selection when a particular brand name is attached to a given product (Sherry, 2005). Certainly, the branding of products can possibly serve as a way to hinder rational thought, or at least redirect it, in a way that blurs the physical body of the object with the brand. Of course, since we know marketers look to culture for their brand identities and meanings, the way in which culture itself becomes blurred in objects gets even more complicated.

There are more straightforward and obvious aspects of a brand, such as cost, that will show consumers how much to value given brands and their products, but marketing and communication also serve to show consumers what to value and how to value those things (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990). There is a contrast in how objects take on specific roles and identities today as compared to the past as “marketing strategies attempt to ‘punctuate’ consumption activity by seeking to distinguish ordinary and special occasions, mimicking the spheres of goods in earlier societies” (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990, p. 317). Marketers are tasked with selling ideas (Bernays, 1928), which poses a significant challenge: brands have to become one with culture despite the fact that their origins may differ from cultural experience.

Cultural Overlap

Marketing’s characteristic nature of taking over the realms once occupied by other cultural contexts is what necessitates this study. To think the marketplace, characterized by consumerism, sees brands trying to replicate into objects meanings that would have once been derived from other avenues of life begs an interesting question about if there are differences between the two constructions of meanings and, if so, what those differences might be.

In the past, objects were imbued with culture, whereas today they are largely imbued with marketing. Objects can certainly still take on cultural meaning in ways that are independent of the marketplace, but the marketplace is a dominant force in telling people how to assign meanings. The result is a blur in distinction of marketing techniques and cultural significance.

The practice of branding is quite possibly an essential characteristic of society today, and, combined with IMC, is largely why culture and marketing are overlapping so extensively. As opposed to societies where needs are the driving force behind consumption, and the requirement of bare necessities is enough to initiate and sustain exchange, a capitalistic society must push consumers to buy beyond what they need. Bell (1976) characterized this distinction simply as one of "abundance," where what needs to be "encouraged" is spending (p. 75); a lack of spending on the part of consumers is detrimental to the economy. A consequence of abundance is the burden of selling goods.

Marketing and branding, then, as discussed in this chapter, have sought out new and innovative ways of reaching consumers for maximum impact. In a marketplace already flooded with advertising and commercial messages, practices like IMC have emerged as effective ways of getting consumer attention and establishing brand reputations. The role that brands take in society sees clearly how brands must gain identities that are both consistent and distinct, while at the same time appealing to specific audiences in specific contexts. These characteristics of brands—as a result of marketing—illustrate how people can be influenced for the purposes of motivating consumption and therefore profit, which is indicative of capitalism.

Before moving more specifically into branding's role in society, however, we must look at objects themselves and how they come to function both within and outside of the marketplace. This discussion is intertwined with cultural and branded meanings of the objects, as in either case humans can come to value objects in ways that deviate from what the objects stand for without such external influences. Since humans can place value into objects based on their own standards and the standards of others, such as marketing practitioners, value is not limited to how objects function in interaction.

The thrust of the argument is that the ways that people come to value objects beyond object function is indicative of a disruption in exchange value, considering that marketing and cultural practices both play roles in how objects might be perceived. Thanks in large part to strong marketing practices such as branding and IMC, culture and marketing are becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish, and brands are directly responsible for altering more traditional notions of value. These alterations manifest themselves not in terms of object function, but rather in terms of what the objects stand for and, subsequently, how they are valued.

As a starting point, then, we can look to Aristotle's work on use value and exchange value, and what these ideas mean for the current market as well as how people derive meaning in their possessions. By applying Aristotle's use value and exchange value to contemporary marketing practices, we can come to understand how brands take hold in an arena where consumer decisions allow for numerous products to perform essentially the same function. The role that culture plays in valuation can also come to light, especially considering that culture can operate outside the marketplace, even in the market is a dominant feature of culture.

Chapter Three: Use Value and Exchange Value

Brands have perhaps not fully rewritten the way in which consumers come to value objects, but they have certainly impacted it. Branding stands out as a marketing practice that grants additional identity to objects, therefore also granting individuals a different way of looking at those objects. Certainly there is also hope that consumers will be willing to spend more for brands they have come to recognize, even in light of having different and potentially less expensive choices.

Brands are extremely prevalent in today's marketplace and society. Brands are, as a rule, abstract and immaterial in the way they attach themselves to consumer goods. By understanding meaning and how an object can be viewed differently based on brands, we get a look at a key component in today's marketplace. Aristotle's ideas of use value and exchange value allow for a particular look at how we value and view objects, which is essential in coming to understand both economic function and the marketplace. These two ideas from Aristotle point us in the direction of coming to understand products and brands and the role they play in culture. How consumers come to value things is an important issue to discuss. Today, a primary consensus is that brands will largely define feelings of equality in exchanges (Schultz & Schultz, 2003).

Factors of Exchange

Equality of exchange as a result of branding is very far removed from the way in which objects might be valued solely on their function. The brand and the use of the object must work together in order to appeal to consumers. Brands represent a kind of external standard applied to an object's natural state—an external standard that affects exchange value. Accordingly, brands are not necessarily central to the discussion but rather where the discussion leads—to begin, we must come to an understanding of use value.

Aristotle (trans. 1986) clearly explained that objects generally have two characteristics, which are largely distinct from one another. As Meikle (1995) stated, “use value” and “exchange value” are the central drivers of economics in Aristotle’s work (p. 8). Use value and exchange value are ways of assessing object function and worth, and the two characteristics are extremely important in looking at the marketplace today. Both use value and exchange value are also necessary factors in understanding consumer interaction.

Value itself is in some ways complex as a concept, and yet at its most basic, is just that…basic. Keller and Berry (2003) stated that brands that tend to meet with success are those that “understand the priority today’s shopper places on getting quality *and* a good price—the ‘value’ equation” (p. 176). Consumers are quite intelligent when it comes to their purchase decisions, largely focusing on the best products they can get for the least amount of money.

Marketing practitioners, at least on some level, recognize that consumers do have choices when they set out to make purchases. Consumers can make choices that are right for their specific needs and circumstances. There is a desire in the marketplace for items and goods that are of high quality (perform their use well), but this characteristic is also tested against what must be exchanged for the item or good. There are points of saturation where consumers will not be willing to make a purchase or trade, so gaining insight into how consumers go about valuing objects in the marketplace is essential for understanding marketing's role in producing meaning. Comprehending what makes for a fair exchange, especially when considering use value, though, is a difficult task.

Reflecting on Aristotle's work, Meikle (1995) defined use value as the function objects have naturally. In other words, use value is simply what an object does as well as what function or functions it fulfills. Use value is characterized as natural because it is defined according to what the object does; in other words, what the object was actually made to do. Use value provides one look at how consumers might seek objects, since objects are required for survival and comfort.

Consumers will need to have numerous objects that fulfill numerous purposes, so acquiring various things with various use values is a certainly necessary. In fact, consumers may find that trading and paying for things are ways of acquiring what they need. This presents the first part of a serious dilemma because objects that have different use values cannot be ascribed as equal in exchanges; they are not commensurate in that way.

The issue is complex and complicated because, while objects are created for the purpose of being used, they are also exchanged (Meikle, 1995); this is not necessarily according to design. Objects possess both use value and exchange value, and can therefore fulfill either purpose (Meikle, 1995). Since use value and exchange value are so much different, it would be difficult to come to an agreeable equation for how to approach an exchange.

There is at least one way to put the exchange into a form of equation. An object is thought through use value to "differ in quality" while in exchange value to differ "only in quantity" (Meikle, 1995, p. 36). For example, Aristotle's (trans. 1986) articulated how a shoe is not initially meant to be exchanged, and so if exchanged for a shirt, does not have resolution. Since use value cannot be made to determine commensurability, exchange value can only be affected in terms of a formula by the amount of things in the exchange.

There are certainly degrees of difference in terms of how well objects fulfill use value. There are also different use values for different objects. As a result, Aristotle could not determine a way to define a just exchange. He therefore placed emphasis in looking at exchange as a question of math more than anything else.

Use value is thus called into question as an application of exchange; this is not to say use value is no factor at all. Morris (1997) pointed out how people are inclined to place a degree of value on objects based upon their function. At least in part, consumers will value things based on what purpose they fulfill, which can impact their value in an exchange. For example, someone in need of doing work that requires a hammer will not only seek out a hammer, but will also be willing to pay or trade more so the hammer can be acquired. The individual might possibly be willing to exchange a little more for the hammer depending on how much it is needed. The purpose or use of the object is certainly important to consider within the context of exchange.

There is no arguing that value can and should be attributed to things for their sought-after natural properties, which can be important when people think about objects they might want to exchange. At the same time, however, consumers will want things for a whole variety of other reasons. For this reason, use value stands in sharp contrast to exchange value, which is not what an object possesses as a natural function, but rather is like an “equation” designed to assist in making objects “commensurable” (Meikle, 1995,

p. 9). Again, this is a predicament because things are not commensurate in terms of the functions they perform.

When people enter into exchanges, they will largely do so in hopes of getting a fair trade. Meikle (1995) explained that ethics in exchange has to do with what is considered “fair” and equal; this is what affects “price” (p. 6). The central dilemma is in figuring out what “exchange value” is because things are not equal based on “use value” and what function they serve; they can, however, have a kind of equality in exchange (Meikle, 1995, p. 8). While the notion of what constitutes a so-called ‘fair trade’ from an ethical standpoint is virtually impossible to define, an economic view can lead to a better understanding of market price and what is involved in an exchange.

Since exchanges are not solely defined on use, exchange value is comprised of many features that will affect perception. At the very least, there is a way to look at an exchange as desirable or acceptable, even if not fully considered fair. In terms of economics, this inquiry is meant to help us understand how we, as consumers, come to value objects.

Simmel (trans. 1978) stated that the way in which we value things is not generally according to natural constitution. While natural constitution is important, other factors will affect the way objects are viewed, having to do with all kinds of external issues. Often times, we come to an understanding of value based on a variety of other factors. Specifically, value is a matter of interpretation and is evaluated in light of given contexts (Simmel, trans. 1978). Use value, which is always fixed, does not fall into this characterization.

Certainly people can gear their exchanges toward acquiring what they need, and therefore they will be more inclined to emphasize use value. Given a capitalist system, however, and given the nature of consumers, use value cannot be an exclusive driver. People are simply not "satisfied" with mere object function (Simmel, trans. 1978, p. 59). Something more is needed to drive them. People instead are inclined to put objects into a hierarchy based on an "order of value" (Simmel, 1978, p. 59), which, unlike use value, stresses how the objects are distinct rather than similar. Again, objects might vary qualitatively based upon their use values, but objects with the same use value are likely to be viewed as similar. When establishing a hierarchy that assesses value, consumers are likely to approach objects according to differences—use value takes a backseat. With an understanding of how to appreciate objects that focuses on how those objects are different, use value cannot be the central factor.

Since exchange value is based largely on contextual issues, simply looking at the use of things and establishing their value in that way ignores other necessary factors (Simmel, trans. 1978) that are part of valuations in exchanges. While objects might be desired because of the necessities they fulfill, there are many more issues taking place that will determine exchange value. This is at least in part due to the nature of consumers being shaped by their things. As long as consumers believe they can be bettered by things they own and accumulate, they will place value in those things in light of or even despite their uses. Marcuse (1964) claimed these attitudes to be "standards of *priority*—standards which refer to the optimal development of the individual, of all individuals, under the optimal utilization of the material and intellectual resources available to man" (p. 6). Optimal material development is not a characteristic satisfied by use value. The central issue is one of more, where people will go to greater levels to accumulate and remove themselves from exchanges restricted by use value needs.

The unnatural characteristic of exchange value becomes all the more apparent. When consumers value objects because those objects are believed to make life better, there is an application to the object that has little to nothing to do with why the object was made in the first place. Simmel (trans. 1978) claimed that the standard for understanding what makes sense in an exchange is to look at the thing given in light of what is acquired, ultimately rationalizing that the two things are of an equal value.

Cost and Benefit

If the goal is truly acquisition and accumulation, then there emerges a considerable problem. Each exchange comprises something given up; the acquisition can only be in light of a cost. This is a highly complicated process considering that, often times, specific objects likely have values and characteristics that other objects simply do not (Simmel, trans. 1978). The actual exchange is dependent upon numerous conditions that are present even beyond mere use, especially since the status of an object might have little or nothing to do with use at all.

The nature of an object is simply not enough to carry it through the exchange—or rather, not without consideration of how the nature of the object may be essential to understanding an object's worth in a given context. The way in which things are exchanged shows clearly that things are valuable for both the self and the other (Simmel, trans. 1978). Of course, the way in which we value things also shows how willingly we will embrace exchange.

The desire to gain, acquire, and accumulate may well be within our nature—or at least it has been indoctrinated into us. As Twitchell (1996) said, "Human beings like things. We buy things. We like to exchange things. We steal things. We donate things. We live through things. We call these things *goods* as in goods and services. We do not call them *bads*" (p. 11). Twitchell's (1996) comment is meant to articulate how we live through things; how we live through goods. If these factors are to be looked at as the drivers of exchange, then we must understand the ways in which meanings derived in objects can impact exchange.

On the one hand, consumers do like to acquire. In other ways of thinking about objects, consumers like giving objects, and, in addition to buying and trading, will also commit theft for objects. Consumers will even live through objects. Objects can have personality defining characteristics—for example, this is something that suits me—or transformative characteristics—I will buy this because it is not something I would normally get. The overwhelming need to have objects in life is transmitted into various cultural arenas, even to the point that objects become grounds for being arrested or broke.

Obviously Twitchell (1996) is proclaiming consumers to be characterized by an almost uncontrollable need to have things, even in spite of how those things are acquired. Consumers then take the things and use them as a way to supplement themselves. Clothing is a great example of this because people often select clothing that appears in line with their style, or they may intentionally select clothing that is different from their normal wardrobe. Such a factor is indicative of how consumers "live through things" (Twitchell, 1996, p. 11), and is also why they come to value those things in particular ways—again, according to a given context. Selecting specific clothing for a specific reason means that consumers are making decisions about what and when to exchange.

Scarcity and desire are two potential ways consumers might be influenced about what and when to exchange. Soros (1998) talked about the assumption that the main determinants of what consumers are willing to pay are “demand and supply” (p. 37). Soros (1998) challenged this assumption while working through it, but still strongly indicated that consumers will look for price and quality when making assessments and judgments over what they choose to purchase. While price, quality, demand, and supply might influence consumer behavior in very specific ways, these characteristics can really not control consumer behavior.

After all, “economics [itself] is the study of choice. It does not tell us what to choose. It only helps us to understand the consequences of our choices” (Buchholz, 2007, p. 1). Since there is no set formula here for discovering how and why consumers choose the way they do, a serious challenge emerges in understanding how consumers attribute worth in objects. In reality, consumers are making decisions linked to how much they demand things, which may or may not be reflected in how they feel about their decisions after the exchange.

Each choice, each decision made by a consumer leading to an exchange is granted to the object as part of the context. Simmel (trans. 1978) emphasized the point when he said that “an object does not gain a new quality because I call it valuable; it is valued because of the qualities that it has” (p. 60). Here we see a basis for why exchange value is evaluated as a property that is not natural; use value is fixed in qualities inherent to the purpose of the object, whereas exchange value is not fixed and may rely on issues such as what can be quantified in an exchange. Use value, which is fixed and unchanging (Simmel, trans. 1978), is a quality of an object, though, quite clearly, there are other qualities objects have that that affect value, too. Exchange value, however, is far from such characterization.

Ultimately, there is no limit to how exchange value can move and fluctuate (Simmel, trans. 1978). What we can learn from the unchanging and natural property of an object only gives us an outlook of exchange value appraisal. Exchange value is much more complicated because "economic analysis proceeds on the basis of preferences that are considered to be given (even though they may occasionally be changing) as a result of physiological needs and psychological and cultural propensities" (Hirschmann, 1982, p. 9). Physiological needs as a basis for exchange are more representative of use value, especially if the things gained are truly needed. Once aspects of culture and psychology enter the fray, however, use value is not as much of a factor. If exchange value, as well as economics as a whole, hinge on the psychological, there is no real formula that can be applied. In fact, psychological dimensions of exchange would suggest that individuals, and not objects, are much more important in determining exchange value.

The driving characteristic of exchange is found in how people must view the exchange as having a resulting benefit; the benefit must be seen as something that did not exist prior to the exchange taking place (Simmel, trans. 1978). In other words, participants in exchange should feel as though they are better off having exchanged. What actually makes an exchange equal—at least, equal in a manner of speaking—largely includes the involved parties coming away from the exchange with a degree of satisfaction. That is why "the economic system is indeed based on…the mutuality of exchange, the balance between sacrifice and gain…it is inseparably merged with its basis and results, desire and need" (Simmel, trans. 1978, p. 81). What is being given up is juxtaposed against what is achieved in a process that will affect feelings and thoughts about the exchange taking place.

Since commensurability in this categorization has to do with perspective, coming to understand exchange value as some sort of universal application is impossible. As Meikle (1995) told us, Aristotle concluded that such an endeavor was virtually futile. What is going to make an exchange "just," then, is generally what people would view as "reciprocity" (Meikle, 1995, p. 10). Again, there must be some kind of balance felt in terms of what was given and what was gained.

There is still the problem of understanding, even at a most basic and minimal level, what is considered reciprocal in an exchange. Reciprocity is not the same as equality in exchange, so there is a way of getting closer to a resolution. Within the framework of reciprocity, Aristotle identified two key issues: one is need, which is context sensitive, and the other is money, because it mathematically quantifies the worth of things (Meikle, 1995).

As touched upon previously, the idea of what is needed is a major part of valuation in exchange. Even needs, however legitimate, have a contextual component. Simmel's (trans. 1978) primary example of this is when he compares bread and a jewel, stating that bread's value increases during a time when food is scarce, regardless of whether such scarcity is temporary or long-lasting. Both location and scarcity are central drivers of consumption (Harford, 2006).

At the same time, individual thoughts and perceptions are possibly also at work. For example, an individual might want a particular jewel because of some kind of personal connection or desire for it (Simmel, trans. 1978). While it might be easy to think of exchange value as hinging only on the conditions of a given situation, the individuals' opinions, as well as countless other factors, are also going to impact exchange value.

The apparent needs clearly demonstrate how exchange value is a matter of convention, and not nature. Even if the needs are physiological (Hirschmann, 1982), scarcity of the objects required to meet physiological needs is still a factor. In addition, scarcity of objects required to meet physiological needs, such as bread, can mean that other objects, such as jewels, have less worth when exchanged. Both objects in the exchange are heavily affected by conditions. These qualities are fully representative of the central characteristics of "demand and supply" (Soros, 1998, p. 37), which again are the dominant factors in influencing what people are willing to give or lose in their exchanges.

Exchange value is heavily dependent on context, and would, arguably, share common characteristics with Fisher's (1989) depiction of a value, which has to do with "time, place, topic, and culture" (p. 114), all of which are changing conditions. There is instability in exchange value because these issues are present, and may well affect exchange. The issues also comprise ways in which individuals ascribe worth to objects after use is understood.

Numerous factors can play into the value attributed to something within a given context. There is no question use value is important, but objects also have other ways in which they can be both used and understood (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Things are obviously capable of communicating to consumers via their use value, but consumers will add and derive additional meaning through many different aspects of a thing—this is true of what the objects carry in terms of meaning in general and in terms of additional meaning found in use.

The meaning translates into a certain feeling for the consumer. There is a kind of fulfillment consumers get when they are finally able to attain something they want; this is similar to a kind of relief (Simmel, trans. 1978). In many cases, it is the desire consumers have for the thing that drives them more than the actual need for the thing (Simmel, trans. 1978), which again stresses how desire might well be contrasted with consumer view after the object is acquired. A key feature of how exchange value is attributed to objects has to do with how it does not have to focus on fulfilling needs—though it can—and can be more of a psychological and emotional motivation. The object itself may well be of secondary concern, or, in some cases, almost no concern if in fact accumulation is truly the goal.

As discussed earlier, one specific way the exchange value of an object can be impacted is through scarcity—or at least, perceived scarcity. Objects can become much more appealing to consumers if there is, for one reason or another, some trouble in obtaining them (Simmel, trans. 1978). The harder consumers try to obtain something, and the more they fail to do so, the more they may attribute a higher exchange value for the thing (Simmel, trans. 1978).

For example, many collectible items are often intentionally short-packed. Skylanders, a recent video game, includes action figures that can be played on screen. As extra incentive to collectors, there are color variants of some figures that are extremely rare. When shipments of the figures are sent to stores, they may only contain one—if any—color variant. As a result, consumers who wish to have the figures must look around extensively for them, or perhaps even purchase the figures on ebay at inflated prices. The resistance of possession makes objects all the more exciting to not only have, but to wish to have.

In the economy, working for money is one possible outlet toward gaining more things (Baran & Sweezy, 1966), and also one possible way to look at an initial exchange. Payment for work presents an interesting issue since money is meant to dispel the problems of exchange (Ferguson, 2008). Money is compensation for work (Meikle, 1985), and the more money one makes, at least theoretically, the more things one can get. Work in this way is the first part of exchange because it is given in order to ultimately receive something. Of course, there is no real guarantee that just because an individual has money he or she will be able to gain what he or she seeks to have. In fact, saving up and working more may be required.

There is a clear link from the point of working for gain to the point of using that gain in order to gain something else. Simmel (trans. 1978) believed that "if we regard the economy as a special case of the general form of exchange—a surrender of something in order to gain something—then we shall at once suspect that the value of what is acquired is not ready made, but rather accrues to the desired object wholly or in part from the extent of the sacrifice required" (p. 87). The main thought is that the people consuming and the people selling both feel a sense of improvement from an exchange, as long as there is nothing that makes someone take part against his or her own will (Harford, 2006). For this reason, work is the sacrifice needed to gain money, which then correlates to a purchased object as a sacrifice or even a loss that occurred for the purpose of attaining and achieving the object. Hopefully, the result is a positive feeling, as that is what is meant to be a characteristic resulting from an exchange—again, as long as there is no coercion.

Money

Money is extremely important in this regard because it functions as an equalizer. In more progressive economic systems, money is paramount in exchange—as opposed to just trade (Thames, 2010). Of course, money only has value in accordance with what others are willing to honor in an exchange (Ferguson, 2008), so its valuation is in a constant state of flux and change. Money's value can increase or decrease; as such, putting effort into acquiring something can make that something all the more desirable—perhaps even the more worthwhile—in an exchange. The effort required to gain money is vital because many consumers anticipate that objects they manage to gain will give them the fulfillment they envision before the exchange takes place (Hirschmann, 1982), so working toward those objects is a path toward gratification and also a resistance to possession.

We must remember, though, that money has exchange value only (Meikle, 1995; Simmel, trans. 1978), and an important feature of money is that people must come to some kind of decision or understanding of its worth (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Money, then, is in a constant state of fluctuation and its value can be a bit of a gamble over time. Money is ultimately meant to be a thing of exchange which exists outside of what it is being exchanged for (Meikle, 1995), and is really nothing more than that. While money serves an important purpose in quantifying amounts and therefore worth, it has no use value. Fighting in life specifically for money's accumulation sets an individual down a potentially problematic path, and working for the sole purpose of becoming wealthy is an ongoing and never-ending pursuit because money cannot be limited as a potentially usable thing (Meikle, 1995).

The contrast of money compared with other goods is that it possesses not the two characteristics of use value and exchange value, but rather just exchange value alone (Aristotle, trans. 1986). In addition to having exchange value, goods have use value, which grants them more stability and more fixed value compared with money, which is even more susceptible to conditions and changes.

In effect, when goods are worth more, money is worth less (Simmel, trans. 1978). In the previous example of bread provided by Simmel (trans. 1978), bread would be extremely important when food is scarce. Money, which has no use value at all, would not be deemed so important—unless, of course, it is the vehicle for obtaining bread. Money's unpredictable worth is illustrated in this example because money can only really remain valuable if people are willing to allow it. Goods, on the other hand, will retain their use value, and so context and perceptions are not their only defining features.

The unpredictable value of money would not necessarily be a problem, except that people tend to spiral into despair and misery when financial crises occur (Ferguson, 2008). This is the challenge of the accumulation of money—the context sensitivity is further exaggerated. While goods may come in and out of different standards of valuation in exchange, they still have a fixed use value in terms of functions they perform according to their purposes. If an individual has concentrated on money accumulation, and then that individual sees financial crisis, there is no use value to fall back on.

The fact that money exists independently of usable goods (Meikle, 1995) demonstrates just these kinds of dangers. The value consumers place on goods has to do with how much those goods are wanted or needed (Simmel, trans. 1978). Money does not work in the same way. Although money can be desired, it is a desire that is rooted in accumulation and not necessity. This is why Thames (2010) articulated that once the goal of work is separated from what is produced, there is less reason to focus on what is produced—rather, the focus is on what is gained.

A desire and focus on what is gained is not just limited to money, either. There are goods that, though not money, are also linked to gain more than need. This is largely cultural. The desire to become wealthy and to accumulate money is also a characteristic commonly found in the consumption of luxury goods.

Luxury Goods

Often luxury goods have a false idea of scarcity around them because of their cost and subsequent indication of status (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990). Luxury goods are largely meant for show off because they are difficult to attain both in terms of price and exclusivity. For example, luxury cars such as BMWs might not be seen on the road as frequently as less pricey automobile options like Toyotas. Although money needs to have a more specific consensus on worth, luxury goods have a general consensus that they are worth quite a bit.

How the goods indicate status is at least part of what makes the goods prestigious in the first place. They are meant and designed to indicate status. Luxury goods can function that way because a failure to both have and display them is a testament to one not having the necessary material objects that are expected of one's class (Sennett &

Cobb, 1972). There is then a correlation between expectation and reality, and luxury goods provide consumers a potential way to fill that gap. This can lead to unwarranted feelings of shame, making the goods necessities despite the fact they are in no way needed (Sennett & Cobb, 1972). Therein lies the sacrifice and gain; give up money that was originally acquired through work or other means in order to gain a way out of self-consciousness for not having what one in a certain position is expected to have. These factors can also drive up exchange value.

The way that luxury goods add such value is similar to the previous conversation regarding context. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) discussed how "anthropologists have accumulated incredibly detailed descriptions of the symbolic use of objects in a variety of cultures" (p.21). What objects symbolize and how they might be used symbolically, even if this is not what was originally foreseen as the use value, could easily impact the exchange value of a good.

The distinction is drawn out more specifically by Leiss, Kline, and Jhally (1990), who said that "a rational use of goods, based on their utility alone (what they can do for us), and an irrational use of goods, based on what they symbolize (what they mean to us) [is] a distinction between use and symbol" (p. 24). The meanings can be ascribed in a whole variety of ways, and these ways do not necessarily have to relate to object utility. A student once explained to me that her sorority used a certain kind of flower in all functions by her sorority. In this example, the flower conjured up images for the student that had to do with symbol, and not use. Culturally-bound meanings can be centered around objects in a way that demonstrates how just this kind of symbolism might occur.

Often times luxury goods are not consumed merely to meet the needs of use value, and have to do with symbol. When “things” are meant to be “signs of words” (p. 361), and “things of experience” are made to “manifest” those words (Burke, 1966, p. 361), those things take on a life that is more indicative of culture than of use value. Morris (1997) similarly described the distinction as one of “function” versus “aesthetics” (p 63). Take once again Simmel’s (trans. 1978) earlier example of the jewel and the bread. Bread might be more valuable in a situation where food is needed and people are going hungry, but the value of a jewel would likely still be determined based on quality—perhaps not for reason of the jewel’s use value, but for something different.

A BMW as a branded car with a distinct look is likely to fulfill a car’s function in the sense that it will get someone from point A to point B. The symbolic and aesthetic features of the car, however, elevate the BMW to a namesake with a certain degree of status and meaning. The BMW is also thought to signify quality, and therefore has value even in light of what it does or money or goods that might be exchanged for it.

Objects can be utilized and valued for their use value, yes, but they can also tap into the wants and feelings of the individuals who have and make use of them (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). The act of consumption is to make sense of oneself, which is essential in understanding how objects can take on meanings that might impact their exchange value—even though the objects become removed from just their natural properties and use values. Exchange value then becomes even more complex, because within an exchange a person is also exchanging part of him or herself (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981).

As mentioned earlier, luxury goods have a symbolic characteristic and also carry with them an expectation associated with certain economic status. Once these characteristics are linked to a standard, they become virtually inseparable from the good, and, subsequently, the consumer. The meaning and value added to an object in an exchange—again, independent of the object's use—can depend on what the object given up means for the individual involved who parts with the object. Again, there is a context sensitive dimension to exchange value.

Pressures of Consumption

In other words, "if the individuals find themselves in the things which shape their life, they do so, not by giving, but by accepting the law of things" (Marcuse, 1964, p. 11), yet found within situation, time, and culture is also perception (Simmel, trans. 1978). The law of the thing, the property of the thing, is fixed. Understanding how a thing might fully shape life, however, is not fixed only, as it might also be factored into value in an exchange. The way in which the object shapes life depends on characteristics such as time and culture, just as Fisher (1989) identified as characteristics of value in general.

One particular object may be valued to a large degree by one person, and yet a small degree to another (Simmel, trans. 1978); the psychological component to valuation is highly individualized. Since value is heavily dependent on an individual's personal feelings and thoughts at a given point in time, the individual becomes the standard bearer for how to place value in things (Simmel, trans. 1978). Put simply exchange "value is never a 'quality' of the objects, but a judgment upon them which remains inherent in the subject" (Simmel, trans. 1978, p. 63). In actuality, a brand's valuation, as well as what is fair to pay for a brand, rests solely in the hands of the consumer; in a way, consumers have more power than marketing practitioners (Schultz & Schultz, 2003). Although that might appear to contradict what is expected since marketers are the ones who develop brands, consumers are the ones making conscious choices about how and if to value the brands once they are on the market.

The difference we see today is found in how these understandings of exchange value and reciprocity are reached. Specifically, the influential nudge consumers are given is the distinguishing feature. Leiss, Kline, and Jhally (1990) discussed how, "unlike goods in earlier societies, [goods today] do not bear the signatures of their makers whose motives we might assess because we know who they are, nor do they tell us how we should behave with them as they do in societies with closed spheres of exchange" (p. 325). Today, the marketplace and certain marketing practices do tell us exactly how we should value objects—Leiss, Kline, and Jhally (1990) specifically mention advertising functioning in this role.

Most consumers would likely view marketers as kinds of abstractions, despite the fact that marketers are the ones marking or branding their products and developing standards through which the products meet levels of prestige. In societies where marketing does not have such a central role, "decisions operate directly over the realm of natural kinds, and the main constraints are natural necessities and social mores" (Meikle, 1995, p. 171). As established earlier, natural necessity cannot drive a working capitalist system since meaning ascribed is used to deal with the abundance of materials. In contrast to necessity, and "under market economy, decisions operate primarily over exchange values, and the most imperative constraints, overriding even custom and ethics, are laws and cycles arising largely from the system of exchange value itself" (Meikle, 1995, p. 171). In a market built on necessity, use value is paramount; in a market built on accumulation, exchange value is paramount.

There is a question, now specifically focusing on brands, that remains as a result of this conversation: what specifically does the role of marketing mean as it relates to exchange value? The answer appears to be that marketing looks to older societies, where need fulfillment was the main basis for exchange; marketing attempts to copy the desire for need fulfillment by communicating through various marketing messages (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990). How exactly this is communicated and how needs are converted into exchange desires, however, is the main distinction.

We must again look at the way money operates through a consensus of worth. Douglas and Isherwood (1996) claimed that "without some conventional ways of selecting and fixing agreed meanings, the minimum consensual basis of society is missing" (p. 43). The distinction is that marketing plays a central role in creating these identities around goods, designed for an economy where money is primarily what is used in exchanges. In this way there is a sort of mutual understanding of the value of things (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996) because of the mass presence that many marketing practices have. Even if individuals are free and able to value things as they see fit, psychologically or otherwise, society's influence as presented by marketers and mass messaging is difficult to ignore, especially with the existence of such strong and recognizable brands.

Unlike in less market-driven societies, the primary factor which impacts exchange value in today's marketplace society is the motivation directed almost solely toward exchanges. Though goods and use values are not completely inconsequential, most of the marketing focus is on exchange, with the specific goods themselves taking a backseat in the marketing messages (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996). Goods are characterized much more extensively as things to buy and acquire and possess rather than to make use of, suggesting that their function is primarily to convey something to others; this embodies yet another type of ranking that we may see manifested in an exchange.

Once again, the central reason to value goods hierarchically is related to their ability to better ourselves and our conditions. Twitchell (1996) mused that “in giving value to objects, advertising gives value to our lives” (p. 4). By applying objects directly to our lives, many objects become so much more than their usable function; instead, they become a part of the consumer. The directional approach of advertising in seeking to instill objects with meaning is evidenced by the way in which advertising communicates a lifestyle and identity around those objects—namely, by showing us how we might value ourselves by valuing certain objects in certain ways.

This also makes the objects all the more desirable. As consumers work to gain money and then spend that money to acquire goods, their motivation might be increased simply because the focus is on what can be gained in an exchange. When marketing messages appeal to consumers, they do so in large part with an emphasis on what Harford (2006) described as an improvement. If consumers genuinely believe that they can improve themselves through the acquisition of certain objects, they will likely also be much more fixated on the exchange.

Once these kinds of valuations take place, goods become “classified in ranked, discontinuous, or incommensurable spheres of exchange” (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990, p. 314). Communication plays a pivotal role in creating these kinds of values, again because of the sheer presence and visibility marketing communication can have. There is both concern and criticism over how these messages impact consumers, as well as what the goals and motivations of the marketers might actually be.

The marketing does not center on telling consumers how they can improve as if they are already great, but rather signifies flaws in the consumer; the marketing is meant to show solutions. Leiss, Kline, and Jhally (1990) described marketing as taking on the role of “an endless series of suggestions about the possible routes to happiness and success” (p. 287). The trick—and the reason why many people criticize marketing—is to create a situation where consumers are never fully happy based on what they have consumed (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990), leading the consumer into a constant state of ranking and valuing. What is most important is that the constant ranking and valuing be for new things, as they are not yet possessed. Accordingly, consumerism can very easily get out of hand and problematic in much the same way a desire for wealth and monetary gain can.

Exchange value, as evidenced in this chapter, stands in strong contradiction to use value, since use value does know a finite boundary. The characteristic nature of focusing on exchange in marketing practices, as well as the desire for more goods or money, does not know this finite boundary. When exchange value, and not use value, is emphasized through influential marketing messages, a fixed natural property of how a thing can be used becomes far less relevant.

Instead, the central characteristic of marketing is to drive consumers toward valuing certain things in certain ways, which assists consumers in coming to understand how to view people, objects, and their surroundings. All of these characteristics are fluid and contextual, meaning that they can be impacted and changed in various ways. Aristotle's ideas of use value and exchange value serve to highlight how marketing and branding take on this unique role that might well be needed in sustaining a capitalist system.

The brand, after all, is little more than a mark or indicator that is designed to assist consumers in both decision making processes and attributions of worth. Specific brands, though, stand for specific things, and cannot be separated from such understandings. Since brands are constructs placed on products, ultimately affecting their exchange value while leaving use value untouched, they seek to have power and value in exchange—again, the driving force in capitalism.

For these reasons marketing and branding are worth taking a look at despite what their impact on exchange value—positive or negative—might be. After all, "economics [itself] is the study of the developed forms of exchange value, of the regularities in its movement, and of its interaction with use value" (Meikle, 1995, p. 21). Exchange value must be present even in a situation where use value is the more stable of the two. Though use value is still evident in today's marketplace, the primary emphasis is on exchange value. This is expected given the presence and influence of brands and brand competition for consumer attention and profit. Thus, exchange value must be central to our understanding of the aim of marketing practices.

What is important within this definition is the same as what is important in Twitchell's (1996) definition of branding. Again, Twitchell (1996) saw branding as "the central activity of creating differing values for…commonplace objects" (p. 13). Brands are, by design, a means of impacting exchange value. Brands are, in much the same way that economics might be described, “becoming…the currency of exchange…the intersection of self and other” (Twitchell, 2004, p. 24). As drivers of exchange, brands add meaning to products, and do so for the purpose of connecting with consumers on a greater level than might be possible without the brand influence. Of course, brands invite a whole different kind of market economy, which may have favorable or detrimental outcomes.

In theory, it is the competition of brands, which can be lessened or possibly even eradicated, that is largely responsible for how good products and prices in the marketplace are (Harford, 2006). In fact, corporations at times combine brands [such as in the occasional case of Marvel and DC] so they can play to both brands’ strengths, as they may otherwise struggle competitively against one another (Travis, 2000). With a whole host of products and options out there, exchange value can be a major factor in what consumers come to understand and deal with apart from use value. Once consumers are separated so extensively from the consideration of use value, they are thrown into a market that does not rely on product function.

Consumers, of course, still need particular products because of their function, so function is not removed from the way in which valuation takes place. While consumers can certainly seek out and attain objects that are in no way necessary for their lives, they will also likely look for objects that do serve necessary functions. In this way, it is clear that consumers will ascribe value from function in many cases, though the consumption process does not exclusively depend on it. Here we glimpse a driving feature of influence in a capitalist system; what can be described as a want versus a need.

Chapter Four: Wants Versus Needs: The Role of Branding

Consumers will undoubtedly attempt to acquire objects that are necessary for survival and well-being; however, these objects still have the capacity to be characterized by brand choice and extravagance. In many cases, objects that serve virtually no practical function are also consumed. Consumers do not limit themselves to what they need when they set out to make purchase decisions. What consumers need and what consumers want are blurred in today's market.

Marketing plays an important part in our lives, especially in terms of what we consume. The dimensions of marketing are largely psychological (Ellul, trans. 1965), playing on our wants and desires in order to develop strong appeals. The goal of the marketing practitioner is to encourage us to make informed choices about what we buy. By coming up with powerful marketing messages, marketing practitioners influence both our ideas and our thought processes (Ellul, trans. 1965).

The Marketing Blur

We find that marketing today plays a—the?—central role in both forming who we are and shaping our perspectives. Twitchell (1996) claimed that we are currently seeing a culture where marketing and advertising are the primary institutions. This is a driving component to the way individuals come to understand society—that it is largely through marketing practices and consumption. Advertising assists culture by directing consumers toward what to buy and even how to go about buying it (Gossage, 1976), playing a mainly informative role about choices and options in the market.

What has occurred is a kind of marketing space where objects are reflective of culture insofar as they become one with it. Marketing practitioners utilize marketing messages in order to inform consumers and allow products to develop a personality that is very much indicative of culture. In accomplishing both objectives, marketing practitioners allow consumers to both make informed decisions and understand how objects should be present in their lives.

Television commercials give consumers the best and most frequent indications of how they should go about making use of their leisure time and their money, which is why consumers pay so much attention to commercials and marketing messages (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Marketing's move to becoming such a central part of our lives has occurred in large part because advertising has become much more about consumers than about specific products (Twitchell, 1996). Consumers are shown how important it can be to have certain things. In other words, consumers are intertwined with things and things are intertwined with consumers.

The key, and also the dilemma, to this kind of marketing is to have people believe they are making their own rules (Jarvis, 2009), as opposed to marketing practitioners making the rules for them. Consumers are not in full control by any stretch of the imagination, even if the control does tip in their favor. While consumers can make their own decisions, they are still constantly exposed to the influence of marketing efforts. In reality, marketing and consuming happen at the same time (Twitchell, 1999), and there is a tension in Integrated Marketing Communication between consumer want and demand and what the organization wants (Schultz & Schultz, 2003). These two sides are constantly strained and weighted against one another.

The process of consumption and the actual amount of control consumers have over it, however, is met with skepticism. The only ones able to judge the level of control are the consumers themselves (Marcuse, 1964), though their understanding is likely flawed. The problem Marcuse (1964) saw was that consumers are never really able to have or even assess the control over their decisions because the influential power of marketing takes it away—even if consumers envision acting in ways that are independent of marketing, their assessment is still in light of marketing exposure. Because of the role of the marketing practitioner, the market carries with it “prescribed attitudes and habits, certain intellectual and emotional reactions which bind the consumers more or less pleasantly to the producers and, through the latter, to the whole” (Marcuse, 1964, p. 12), which is characterized by goals of “consent and compliance” (Hardt, 2004, p. 28). The marketing practitioners, in an attempt to notify consumers of products, also have a say in what culture looks like.

What is clear is that our things become so intertwined with us that they form a distinctive characteristic of the existing culture. As discussed previously, “the claim of the American economic system was that it had introduced abundance, and the nature of abundance is to encourage prodigality rather than prudence” (Bell, 1976, p. 75). As a direct result of this marketed mentality, “excessiveness replaced thrift as a social value” (Ewen, 2001, p. 25). Our consumption, excessive as it might be, says quite a bit about who we are. Marketing practitioners are constrained by abundance in the market, as consumers are free to choose the things they want from that abundance. The exchange value of things plays a major role in this process—since consumers need to learn about and assess their options.

How Brands Affect Exchange Value

In the way we understand exchange value in Aristotle's view, it is "substance" that possesses a "nature." (Meikle, 1995, p. 17). For this reason, exchange value is not described as having a characteristic nature (Meikle, 1995). Branding, which impacts exchange value in some way, is exactly in line with this idea from Aristotle because brands do not have a substance. In fact, by extension of Aristotle's idea, brands do not really have a nature, either, as there are no natural properties or ends to them. In reality, they are used to distinguish products in the marketplace, ultimately impacting their worth. This is exactly why Travis (2000) classified brands as intangibles.

Brands also carry with them the susceptibility of having exchange value only. They are highly sensitive to context, and have no real set nature. Since brands are inventions of people and the marketplace, they can easily fluctuate in worth.

Brands have the capacity to make objects more or less valuable, depending on impressions of the brand (Calkins, 2005). In other words, brands can have either a positive or negative impact in an exchange. If consumers feel positively toward a brand, the valuation of that brand is likely to be higher; if consumers feel negatively toward a brand, the valuation of that brand is likely to be lower. Despite the fact that brands can have meaning for consumers, brands really do not have much practical function beyond this characterization.

Take Twitchell's (2004) earlier metaphorical example of a friend of his whom discussed his job as being one where he has to convince people that one quarter is worth more than another. The example clearly illustrates the way that branding can work. Here, neither quarter is really altered, other than to convince the consumer that, for some reason, the one quarter is worth more than the other. Certainly, the quarter remains physically the same. Products can easily be altered, but doing so to alters their natures. When brands are altered, products can be left the same. The substance of the object can be left unchanged, even though the exchange value is affected. Again, the exclusive exchange value characteristic of a brand means a high susceptibility to valuation in context.

In the way the marketplace works, brands can exist in a space where they are producing similar products to other brands. Here is where the quarter example works well in understanding different brand valuations and how some brands can come to be worth more than others. Once brands have gained ground, they can then begin to compete with other brands for consumer attention and sales.

For example, Lipton produces iced tea, though Nestea is also a brand of iced tea. Logically speaking, there are probably some formula or recipe/ingredient differences between the two, but ultimately they both produce iced tea. As recognized brand names, the two can likely charge more than generic or lesser known brands, and consumers might interpret Nestea and Lipton as different, depending on experiences and preferences.

Revlon and Cover Girl, two popular brands of makeup, function in much the same way. Despite the fact that consumers can go to stores such as Macy's and purchase brands of makeup such as Lancome, Revlon and Cover Girl promote their quality items, and also cost significantly less. Given that Lancome has a more upscale name and is sold at a store like Macy's, it has more value—or at least, consumers might be willing to pay more for it.

The branding applies to services and not just objects, as well. A consumer can select AT&T or Verizon as cell phone providers. Both will provide phones, and certainly smartphones are available from various retailers, but AT&T and Verizon have a namesake that might cause consumers to gravitate toward them. The quality of customer service they provide could also factor into such assessments. With these three examples, what is clear is that brands are driven by their attempt to rely on relationships with consumers—the brands gain ground by lasting and forming hopefully positive impressions over time.

Critiques of Marketing

The way that marketing and branding affect consumer relationships and understandings of goods is exactly the reason why marketing has come under fire. Scholars believe that marketing creates “false needs” for consumers, ultimately causing consumers to live beyond their means (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990, p. 17). Advertising plays an important part in this equation, since “advertising furnishes material goods with social meanings in response to expressed or anticipated false or true needs” (Hardt, 2004, p. 23), and is even characterized as encouraging a problematic “lack of choice” (Hardt, 2004, p. 25) among consumers. Often times, however, advertising has been met with negative response because marketers seem to make goods valuable even if the products themselves do not lend themselves to such value (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990). The fuel for such criticism is simply that marketing is designed to affect exchange value, which can potentially be accomplished with little consideration of an object’s use value.

Negative positions toward branding, advertising, and marketing are juxtaposed with views such as how “advertising cannot create desire,” but “it can channel it”

(Twitchell, 1996, p. 4). In other words, desire must be present for reasons beyond what advertising can provide. Twitchell (1996) suggested here a severe limitation to the power of advertising: that it cannot cause consumers to desire things, but it can assist in helping consumers make choices about what to desire. Twitchell’s (1996) characterization might also suggest that people are still developing culture in objects themselves, with advertising just reinforcing the cultural aspects. At the very least, advertising allows consumers to better understand what brands and products stand for (Travis, 2000). The argument that advertising is only able to channel desire is a much more positive assessment, considering that a marketplace dealing with the abundance of goods has to inform consumers how to make the best choices. Without advertising, this would be exceedingly difficult.

Whether advertising is viewed as positive or negative hinges largely on how much control and rationality are credited to consumers. Douglas and Isherwood (1996) claimed that consumers do have quite a bit of the authority in their consumption, though this authority can be focused and utilized in a variety of ways. For example, some consumers will exercise brand loyalty when faced with purchase decisions, simply because they feel their brand choices are the right ones (Travis, 2000). Consumers, after all, will largely embrace brands because they feel a degree of comfort with the brand name (Schultz & Schultz, 2003; Travis, 2000). While some consumers may not find themselves loyal to brands at all, they are still choosing what is best from their perspective with the decisions they make.

Failing to engage decisions with necessary thought—especially in the case of brand loyalty—could be negative, but a positive outlook on brand loyalty is that an individual can turn to a brand because it is trusted and has given positive experiences in the past (Travis, 2000). Individuals who are busy or who come to trust certain brands over others might well be willing to pay more for that convenience and familiarity. More specifically, consumers value the simplicity of selecting brands they have come to trust, because they can expect a certain standard of value from them (Keller & Berry, 2003). In not having to think too much when making a brand choice, consumers can gain a trustworthy and—hopefully—consistent experience. Despite the fact that brand loyalty is less likely to occur today (Weiner, 2006), an assessment of a good experience at a good cost (Keller & Berry, 2003) that ultimately results in brand loyalty is not without its positives in a marketplace overloaded with choice.

Whether marketing practitioners come to terms with it or not, consumers are free to make decisions. The marketplace functioning in a way that allows for so many options further intensifies marketing practitioners' lack of control. After all, "consumerism is not forced upon us" (Twitchell, 1999, p. 11); rather, we can choose to buy certain things and not others—or to buy nothing at all. In many ways, consumers might be happier consuming things they later regret than not consuming anything (Twitchell, 1999). In this way, the act of consumption is a gratifying process that supersedes the decision not to buy.

The trick is looking at capitalism not as being able to "have as much as you want of what you want," but rather as "having just one of many choices" (Twitchell, 2002, p. 2), where the central issue is a question of "*if* we buy and use the right stuff" (Twitchell, 1999, p. 6). Where consumers might once have felt guilty for not obtaining enough, they would now feel guilty for not obtaining the correct things (Twitchell, 2002), a shift that puts pressure on consumers to have certain brands and products. A tendency toward consuming too much can obviously cause financial problems, but the market appears to be set up not to encourage this—rather, it is set up to encourage the consumption of some things over others. The direction of a market that is geared toward having consumers consume the right things can also result in financial problems, especially considering that brands can affect price.

Brands, which are perfect indicators of the inclination the market has toward choice, do have the ability to form an attachment with consumers, but they also tell consumers what they should and should not consume. Brands can even empower people to feel a certain way. For example, "a woman suddenly feeling beautiful or sophisticated because she is wearing a new necklace or a young man feeling free because he is driving his own car are common experiences. Without doubt, things actively change the content of what we think is our self and thus perform a creative as well as a reflexive function" (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981, p. 28). In letting consumers make and understand their choices, marketing practices allow people to select brands and products that have connections and meanings specifically to them.

The overall picture of how marketing practices drive materialism in a particular direction is by establishing to consumers both who they are and what they need to pursue. If the goal of a brand is in fact to stand out and establish connections (Calkins, 2005), then consumers are able to identify and make sense of their choices because the "brand is a set of associations linked to a name, mark, or symbol associated with a product or service" (Calkins, 2005, p. 1). Brands become entrance points for quality and identification purposes.

Actually, the brands that seem to do the best are the ones consumers put the least amount of thought into (Travis, 2000). When consumers feel trusting of a particular brand, they do not really need to further engage their purchase decisions. Leiss, Kline, and Jhally (1990) discussed "choices" and "preferences" for the consumer which are designed to "promote innovation and competitiveness," also saying this can potentially have "disturbing economic effects" (p. 17). While brands and organizations competing for consumer attention and money can serve as catalysts for quality goods in the marketplace, there is also concern about how these kinds of marketing goals are achieved.

Since it is very difficult to accurately and numerically assess how advertising impacts consumers, most of the criticism is "rhetorical" (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990, p. 17). Rather than focus so much energy into deconstructing specifics on how marketing and advertising are detrimental to society, criticisms gravitate toward the persuasive elements of the marketing messages. The power marketing has is what is considered suspect.

This is exactly the reason why advertising can be referred to as "the literature of the masses" (Hardt, 2004, p. 23). Consumerism can get out of control, and a hypothesized reason for this is due to the influential and persuasive power of marketing. The central power advertising has is found in its ability to prey upon what consumers understand to be needs. Once consumers come to interpret their wants as needs, their thought processes in terms of acquiring those wants is largely disrupted.

The wants that seem to take the most hold on consumers are those that stem from needs. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) discussed how consumers put quite a bit of attention into better things such as “houses, clothes, food, and gadgets” (p. 229). The base needs of “food, warmth, and security” become an issue of bettering each of these things, turning into a completely insatiable desire (Csikzentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981, p. 229).

Instead of being content with a house, a bigger house is needed—or at least, additions to the current house need to be made. Clothes in and of themselves are not enough because consumers can get nicer clothes, and so on. There is a great desire, a great want, which characterizes this consumer behavior in the marketplace. Consumers are not okay with fulfilling their needs through what they have, but rather desire to improve their needs through wants—what they do not have.

Twitchell (1999) offered a seemingly simple suggestion about how to stay afloat financially. He said you must, when faced with an opportunity to spend, “isolate the need…don’t let *needs* be confused with *wants*” (Twitchell, 1999, p. 274). Consumers can easily confuse needs and wants, which is also central to how marketer practitioners market products.

Want and Need Distinction

The distinction between a want versus a need is as follows: “animals” have a clear purpose, which “is to live,” while humans have a clear purpose, which is “to live well” (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981, p. 232). Consumers have wants and motives that stem from what they see as satisfying needs (MacIntyre, 1999). Human beings as a whole, however, have extreme difficulty in defining what their needs truly are (MacIntyre, 1999). The idea of living well, as opposed to just living, is the reason why consumers take part in a never-ending cycle of consumption. Consumers buy into a market characterized by abundance simply by failing to cease their spending once their needs have been met.

At the absolute minimal level, people have needs that are the same as animals; those that are physical (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996). These are thought to be our actual needs (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996). Really, "the only needs that have an unqualified claim for satisfaction are the vital ones—nourishment, clothing, lodging at the attainable level of culture" (Marcuse, 1964, p. 5). In the marketplace, however, there are false needs in addition to actual needs (Marcuse, 1964), which is due in large part to marketing efforts. The so-called false needs are the kind that manifest through almost inevitable participation in society and exposure to messaging (Marcuse, 1964).

In our current climate, "once the basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing are satisfied for most people, capitalism faces the problem of 'realization,' of making sure that the huge numbers of goods produced beyond this minimal level are consumed" (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990, p. 20). The focus on false needs is therefore much different than from those of real needs. In the case of real needs, there are much clearer restrictions on how much one should or even can own.

Meikle (1995) observed that when use of objects is the main concern, accumulation of objects is "limited in size and number by the ends [the objects] serve" (Meikle, 1995, p. 45). Of course, consumers today are not going to limit themselves in this regard, and will instead focus on gaining more than what their needs would dictate (Hirschmann, 1982). When consumers concern themselves more with what they want, there is nothing really dictating what they will attempt to consume.

Marketing works by exploiting the characteristic humans have of not being happy with only fulfilling their needs. In fact, despite the fact that many individuals claim that children are marketed toward so much differently than adults, children are in fact generally exposed to the exact same influences as adults (Postman, 1999). Wants and needs are also similar—thus, marketers approach them in the same way (Postman, 1999). By working within the confines of certain marketing formulas, marketers are able to tap into the desire almost all consumers have for more, bigger, and better things.

Not every consumer, though, is able to achieve these more, bigger, and better things in the same ways. Historically, marketers have reacted, in large part, based on the amount of money consumers have (Bell, 1976) when dealing with this issue. The general attitude marketing practitioners have toward consumers is that once consumers have the necessary amount of money to fulfill their needs, they will direct their consumer behavior in different directions (Bell, 1976). The more a consumer is able to fulfill actual needs, the more he or she will be capable of funneling money elsewhere. It then makes logical sense that the best and most ideal target audiences are the ones with money beyond what they need to live (Lippmann, 2004). Again, marketing's role of showing consumers what choices they have as well as influencing consumers on those choices is central.

The marketing and consumption of goods occurs at various stages, as even moving from the warehouse to the store to consumers is part of what is considered consumption (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996). The constant consumption of messages and goods is evident in virtually all aspects of the marketplace today. As mentioned earlier, saturation of messages is how marketers utilize marketing to make consumers believe choices are their own (Williams, 1980).

Twitchell (2004) referred to this marketing issue as a "disease" that "is spread by advertising, packaging, fashion, branding, and all the base contagion of marketing" (p. 6). Once the disease takes hold, there is little chance of stopping its spread. Consumers who are making choices are heavily impacted by the roles marketers play, and, once a consumer is assimilated into the marketer's realm, there is little likelihood of the consumer being fully free from marketing ever again.

In the past, people may have been better identified through the things which they created, but today it would seem that people forge their identities and meanings around what they consume—what they currently have is not the full part of this equation. What happens today is that people can only really come to understand and identify themselves through what they manage to consume (Marcuse, 1964). There is a "selling of well-being and happiness from the consuming of goods" (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990, p. 294), where the marketing aims at allowing people to see a way to "finally arrive at contentment or well-being" (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990, p. 295), and this formula of accumulation rather than well-being as characteristic of society means there will be people ultimately left in the dust (Hardt, 2004).

When marketers tell consumers what they should consume, there results a kind of "euphoria in unhappiness" in that the wants are never quite fulfilled (Marcuse, 1964, p. 5); it is like a cycle of perpetual consumption. Even if we do accept that consumers are capable of maintaining the ability to make informed choices that are ultimately their own, there is no amount of consumption, and no amount of fulfillment from that consumption, that will ever cease marketing efforts (Marcuse, 1964). Marketing continues to occur, and consumers continue to desire and want more goods. The goods, though, will never carry with them the capacity to help the consumer achieve happiness or satisfaction; only the impression of such achievement. As a result, the goods are more indicative of characteristics of the practitioner rather than the consumer, even if the characteristics are thought to transfer into consumption.

There is no real point of saturation in seeking to attain meaning from consumer goods. Consumption is largely based on consuming things that have high levels of meaning, but very little use (Twitchell, 2002), a cycle that results in owning many things with little practicality. Going back to the concept of exchange value, the fulfillment of having something is the central characteristic (Simmel, trans. 1978); acquiring things because they are vital has far less emphasis. Consumers want to have a higher—though by no means needed—quality of life (Bell, 1976, p. 75).

In such a cycle, "work and accumulation are no longer ends in themselves…but means to consumption and display" (Bell, 1976, p. 74), where "status and its badges…become the mark of success" (Bell, 1976, p. 74). Work and accumulation, then, which may have at one time been efforts geared toward meeting needs, become vehicles through which consumers might strive to get what they want. At least if consumers worked for the purpose of satisfying actual needs, they might more readily see ends in their efforts.

The problem of not seeing clear ends, in meaning or in work, is that consumers "feel whatever they have is not good enough, and they are incapable of enjoying the present for its own sake; delay of fulfillment becomes a way of life" (Sennett, 2006, pp. 31-32). When the fulfillment is central to exchange and fulfillment only rests in what is not currently owned, there exists a pattern of consumption that consumers cannot easily break. The fulfillment is often found in what consumer might be able to get down the road, not what they have now.

There is no doubt that people can get themselves into financial trouble, and there is also no doubt that marketing is often to blame. Even so, the goal of marketing is uncertain, despite the fact that it may well lead to consumers never feeling satisfied with what they have. In fact, it is it is impossible to determine why people gravitate toward specific products (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996; Twitchell, 1999).

Since consumer behavior is so difficult to comprehend or even evaluate, Twitchell (1999) believed that advertising and marketing are often not focused on selling particular products at particular points in time. With branding being so important to marketing today, immediate and boosted revenue tends not to be the primary driver of most businesses (Baran & Sweezy, 1966). Brand success and recognition are frequently the goals in marketing practices, so, while profit is important, marketing is oriented toward more than just pure financial gain. The process of branding requires both time and repeat exposure.

For these reasons, marketing efforts are large determinants in impacting exchange value. As stated by Meikle (1995), Aristotle looked at the great "equalizer in exchange" as being "'want satisfaction'" (p. 29). In the process of exchange, wants are particularly emphasized, as the only way to really know how much an individual truly values an object is to see the exchange itself (Simmel, trans. 1978). What an individual is actually willing to exchange is the best indicator of a thing's value, and is also clear evidence of how exchange value is not fixed, but rather is changing and sensitive to issues of context.

The want that consumers actually have for goods—and the primary purpose of the marketing—may well be linked to the way in which the marketplace creates an identity around the goods. Twitchell (2004) proclaimed branding to be the combination of stories and products, which is most important in a state of market surplus. Consumers get the chance to consume stories in addition to products.

The main contributor to the surplus is unclear, but "American production and marketing techniques (advertising, packaging, branding, fashion, and the like) *and* our eagerness to embrace them…have produced surplus" (Twitchell, 1999, p. 12). Consumers, in addition to practitioners, have a part in the surplus, simply in their want and willingness to consume. Considering that consumers are so willing to purchase things they really could do without, their consumption becomes the primary way they identify themselves (Twitchell, 2002).

The surplus of a capitalistic market, where "most of the world most of the time spends most of its energy producing more and more stuff" (Twitchell, 1999, p. 17), may well have necessitated the importance of stories being attached to brands, seeing as how stories were not so central when people exchanged more out of necessity (Twitchell, 2004). Historically, objects of necessity were able to be sold and exchanged with little to no marketing at all (Williams, 1980).

Of course, that was a much different time. Now surplus is a trait of the market, while at the same time being an obstacle. As Baran and Sweezy (1996) stated, "surplus can be absorbed in the following ways: (1) it can be consumed, (2) it can be invested, and (3) it can be wasted" (p. 79). For these reasons, marketing might be a necessary component to society. At the very least, marketing can be used as a way to encourage consumption, rather than waste. In fact, because the market diminishes desirability in items over time, and creates desirability in new items, consumers might be more likely to pass on hand me downs or donate to charity as they figure out the next thing they would like to purchase. In this way, the surplus of the market continues to move items that may not otherwise be moved.

One way marketers meet this challenge is by distributing messages and concepts to large audiences while at the same time staying geared toward the individual (Iacobucci & Calder, 2003). Advertising itself is said to be "loaded with the rhetoric of interpersonal relations" (Twitchell, 2004, p. 43), attempting to make people feel connected with what they consume. The shift in approach primarily has to do with making objects that are not human feel as though they are (Twitchell, 2004).

With marketing trends the way they are now, "what the advertiser needs to know is not what is right about the product but what is wrong about the buyer" (Postman, 1992, p. 170). For example, ads often stress youth culture, emphasizing how important it is not to lose touch as an adult (Ewen, 2001). In this way, marketing and consumption become ways of fixing problems (Jarvis, 2009). By drawing on what makes people weak, advertising actually deconstructs people into purchases (Ewen 2001).

The only real defense consumers seem to have is to consume enough to feel as though they are materialistically suited to their appropriate societal class (Sennett, 1998), which also has serious flaws considering that advertising creates a standard of life for various economic classes and deviation is thought to be problematic (Ewen, 2001). Herein is the serious problem: the vast majority of consumers are plagued by feeling as though they are not meeting that standard. The market relies on the way "the business of business becomes pseudo-therapy; the consumer, a patient reassured by psychodramas" (Postman, 1992, p. 170). The formula only works because it is shouldered on consumer desire for more things, even if that means disregarding things the consumer already has (Sennett, 2006, p. 5).

Consumers can form attachments to brands because of the way they identify themselves and others through what they consume. The only real reason why objects are able to convey things to others is simply because we allow them to (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990). Marketers recognize that this is natural, and that consumers will consume stories with ease (Morris, 1997), which is exactly why brands revolve around stories and ideas.

The main criticism of this kind of marketing—and also likely the formula that results in marketers continuing the cycle—is that consumers may wind up feeling even worse because the stories and meanings that are designed around satisfaction may be attached to goods that do not produce such satisfaction (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990). Consumers, in believing they can achieve satisfaction from buying, might also continue to consume when they do not reach the desired result. When it comes to believing that objects can grant such satisfaction and instill a sense of happiness, consumers are left to believe they might as well try; the marketplace suggests you will improve with an exchange—all its takes is a price (Gossage, 1967).

Brands allow goods to take on meanings that augment the goods beyond their meaning at a use level. In the marketplace, this is largely based on "experience" coupled with "imagination" (Travis, 2000, p. 78). The brand concentrates on an "emotional core," as a cyclical story filled with feeling (Twitchell, 2004, p. 40). The "buying decisions are made on promises that transcend products, and promises are rooted in human emotions" (Travis, 2000, p. 3). The brands that are successful are even evaluated in terms of a "P-to-E ratio…promises to emotions" (Travis, 2000, p. 3) that they convey to consumers.

From there, consumers can judge specific brands by virtue of the "*brand image* [which] is the external form and observable characteristics of the marketer's offering [and] *brand essence* [which] is the meaning that arises in the customer's creative engagement with the marketer's offering" (Sherry, 2005, p. 48). For example, "Harley-Davidson isn't unique because it makes good motorcycles; there are many companies in the world that make good motorcycles. Harley-Davidson is unique because it has a powerful brand that connects with its customers. The brand transcends the product" (Calkins, 2005, p. 1). The brand offers to the consumer something distinct that the consumer can latch onto, thus impacting the exchange value of the thing that has use value. Twitchell (2004) saw these distinctions as an integral part of today's lifestyle, where stories become important even in common objects. In turn, we come to own things that can be distinguished among "have-to-have, don't-need-to-have, and have-in-order-to-show-off" (Twitchell, 2002, p. 2).

The fact of the matter is consumers like to exchange. The act of making a purchase can be even more gratifying than owning, because exchange is much different than ownership (Twitchell, 2002). There also exists a difference in how consumers utilize the goods, which makes a difference in our view of possession, as well. Leiss, Kline, and Jhally (1990) distinguished between how "goods we consume include all those things whose composition we destroy or alter in deriving benefits from them (food and drink, fuel, personal-care products, and most clothing)" and "other things we use over long periods without greatly changing their material composition" (p. 318). Destroying certain goods and keeping others means that consumers will come to understand and think of their goods differently.

The extent to which individuals will consider the exchange value of a thing has to do with wants and needs, but it also has to do with financial standing. Things, after all, must be used to signify class standing (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996). At the same time, however, "food as a composite commodity is also the prime necessity.

Luxuries, by contrast, are a completely heterogeneous class defined as those goods on which the individual will quickly cut down, in response to a drop in income" (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996, p. 69). In exchanging two things for one another or in spending money for a thing, exchange value of the thing is what is considered, and the value can be impacted by what the person is willing to spend for what they are getting—brand name included. Goods can be conveyed as social markers; a characteristic of the thing very far removed from its use value. To this effect, Leiss, Kline, and Jhally (1990) spoke of "positional goods," which "are the things that allow us to detect social status differences among individuals; their chief value lies in the fact that some persons have them and others do not" (p. 298). The exclusivity of such things denotes their identity and impacts their value.

Without a doubt, there are many factors that disrupt traditional desires of needs on the part of consumers with those of wants. As seen in this chapter, consumer perception, as well as the direction of influential marketing, can make consumers believe they need things when in fact they just want them. Perhaps a defining feature of the marketing, however, is that it is necessary in a society characterized by surplus, where elements of culture must be breathed into objects to make them more desirable. A main question remains: does this characteristic differ from what would have given value to objects in the past?

Considering that marketing practices are largely the drivers of culture today, culture is infused into objects by way of the marketplace—this does not necessarily mean that culture ceases to exist elsewhere. The issue is that cultures that were not so extensively dependent on marketing derived meaning from objects in more concrete ways. These cultures can provide insight into meaning granted to objects without the marketing forces at work.

Again, the marketplace cannot be looked at as an entity that exists independently from culture. Culture, however, has been present in history without the marketplace. Since valuation of objects can occur from both marketing practices and culture, it remains to be seen if and how marketing's meaning in objects is somehow different from that of traditional culture. While there are many factors that can impact exchange value, there exists a component of exchange value that can grant us a better understanding of how objects can be ascribed value in exchange: that of narrative value.

Chapter Five: Narrative Value

Narrative value can be thought of as a dimension of exchange value, in the sense that it has to do with value placed on objects. This valuation is sensitive to context in the same way exchange value is. Today we may think of marketing practices as the primary influence in affecting exchange value, but certainly culture that is not related to the marketplace can accomplish the same thing. In order to explain narrative value as a dimension of exchange value and as something that is potentially different from brands, narrative value as a concept requires some background and exploration.

To further clarify, narrative value is suggested as something that has its roots in culture. The culturally ascribed meaning has the power to affect exchange value, since objects are accordingly valued differently based on meaning. Brands, in much the way as other aspects of culture, can also affect exchange value; the purpose here is to look at both brands and narrative value as parts of exchange value, while at the same time contrasting brands with narrative value.

Culture can find its way into objects in many ways. While it is clear that marketing can achieve such cultural value, there are other ways culture can exist. Regardless of origin, it is apparent that meaning can be placed into objects in ways that impact exchange value. With use value comes a way to place value into objects in an exchange, but since exchanges do not rest on use value alone, there are other means of establishing exchange value.

Value of Objects

The vast majority of objects, aside from money, carry with them the capacities to be valued in numerous ways. Despite that fact, most social scientists focus their research and work on how people interact with one another, as opposed to how people interact with objects (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Still, objects are important to life, and their importance cannot be understated. There is certainly an oversight in not looking at objects extensively, considering that objects are so important in the construction of identity (Sherry, 2005).

Tradition is one key aspect in understanding identity construction, and it is not in line with marketing. Postman (1992) commented that "tradition is, in fact, nothing but the acknowledgement of the authority of symbols and the relevance of the narratives that gave birth to them" (p. 171). Of course, in today's marketing practices we see the minimization of most aspects of culture (Postman, 1992). The basis for the discussion of narrative value hinges on the characterization of how objects come to acquire their meanings. Marketing is capable of imbuing objects with culture, but not necessarily in the same way that cultural tradition can. Even if a branded object finds tradition in the way it is used, the marketing has less to do with the tradition than those who use it.

Everyone is ingrained in culture in some capacity. We must remember that humans are always part of their context as well as their point in history; these things cannot be separated from the human experience (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996). Marketers make sure their appeals are geared toward particular cultural ideals, as cultural norms and values are important to understand for the purposes of persuasion. Brands carry with them cultural markers because of the way they are consumed, but also because marketing practitioners steep themselves in culture and make efforts to allow the brands to culturally reflect their best interpretation of what the brand stands for.

Not everyone in society is privy to the same levels of culture, of course. Advertising itself calls for people to actually embed themselves in culture (Ewen, 2001); however, a lack of time and a lack of money can lead to less community involvement (Putnam, 2000), and therefore less connections and ties to culture. In our society, it is more of a challenge to reach individuals of low economic status; they do not consume as much media, and they live more on the outside of cultural trends (Ellul, trans. 1965). While such individuals still have culture, it is less likely the culture is a result of marketing and advertising practices.

In most cases, though, culture as opposed to brands is more difficult to distinguish. In the marketplace, "cultural junk food is what [we] share" (Twitchell, 1996, p. 7), and culture is fused with goods in branding efforts (Sherry, 2005). This is why "propaganda cannot operate in a vacuum. It must be rooted in action, in a reality that is part of it" (Ellul, trans. 1965). Even individuals who manage to generally avoid cultural messages and expectations are still susceptible to the cultured messages of marketing. Avoiding marketing altogether would be virtually impossible, and there is still the potential to be influenced when exposure does occur.

Brands are really thought of as where we find both ourselves and others (Twitchell, 1996). Brands allow people a way to join with one another and share meaning (Twitchell, 1999), so they function in ways that are similar to cultural objects a community would share. There are, however, points of distinction between brands and culture that originates outside of marketing.

The bonds and the meanings which are supposedly created by the marketplace are not really created at all, but rather influenced and directed by culture. In fact, the most important thing a marketing practitioner can do is come to understand how to fit a brand into who consumers already are and believe themselves to be, as opposed to coming up with new ways for them to be (Twitchell, 1996). Perhaps the reason why branding is so powerful is because marketers identify culture as it is, and then show the same culture in their marketing messages. By drawing on culture as it already exists, brands appear to have a natural invitation and acceptance into people's lives. At the very least, their ability to take hold seems an easy transition.

The practice of marketers attempting to reflect culture rather than create it serves as a starting point for how individuals come to understand culture when aspects of culture outside marketing are difficult to come by. Since we understand brands to mainly forge their identities through storytelling (Twitchell, 2004), it stands to reason that consumers would embrace brands wholeheartedly as they attempt to obtain from brands what is otherwise lacking in culture (Morris, 1997). To this end, Twitchell (1999) posited that "consumption of things and their meanings is how most Western young people cope in a world that science has pretty much bled of traditional religious meanings" (p. 12). As culture steadily disappears from life, the brands that are so well fused with culture become all the more powerful, all the more persuasive, and all the more concrete. Since people live within culture and seek bonds, brands can—perhaps unfortunately—take the place of other, more stable institutions.

Marketplace Substitutions

Today, the economy shows how we value life (Ferguson, 2008), and mass messages form the basis of society (Hardt, 2004). Unfortunately, mass messaging's power is indicative of a society that has failed to see its members have a voice (Hardt, 2004). Conversely, more mass messages equate to or correlate with less ability to have one's own voice (Hardt, 2004). Consumption is now a key determinant in how people connect with others, and it is a way to become part of something.

The problem is that such connection is actually less connected (Sennett, 1976) as a result. Culture itself is belittled when marketing practitioners paly such a large role (Postman, 1992). A lack of additional cultural areas to draw from (Williams, 1980) means that marketers can claim the driving features of culture since cultural understandings are otherwise absent.

The sequence from "branding in the nineteenth century becoming the central meaning-making mode of consumerism" to "the twentieth century," where "the branding process started to enter the marketplace of cultural values and beliefs" (Twitchell, 2004, p. 3) is indicative of the way cultural information is disseminated and absorbed today. What we see is culture and the marketplace overlapping, forming less of a distinction between the two (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990). What it means to belong in culture becomes something altogether different if culture is grounded in and understood from marketing only; for that matter, culture itself becomes something altogether different, as well.

When we share life and cultural experience with marketing as a basis, the driving force is the justifiable feeling of belonging to "a branded community" (Twitchell, 2004, p. 23). Since brands must be interpreted (Travis, 2000; Twitchell, 2004), they allow consumers to identify individuals as within and outside of these communities, even if that basis for judgment is somewhat superficial. There is, in other words, a thought process behind the identification of a brand.

Again, at the core of brands—and their identities—is storytelling, and storytelling is what forms the foundation of culture (Twitchell, 2004). Stories are very important and have much more longevity in literate cultures (Ong, 2002). In fact, literate cultures have the capacity to produce much more structured storylines and plot progressions (Ong, 2002).Without consumers being able to immerse themselves in deep and intricate storylines, brands would likely not have the staying power they have found today.

If nothing else, brands are largely dependent upon stories in order to differentiate themselves from other product options on the market (Twitchell, 2004); the story serves to distinguish goods and ultimately impact exchange value. Fisher (1989) reflected that "viewing human communication narratively stresses that people are full participants in the making of messages, whether they are agents (authors) or audience members (co-authors)" (p. 18). In effect, consumers will continually make efforts to reassess their options (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996), thereby always considering their brand choices and loyalties. When consumers are allowed to both observe marketing efforts and interact with brands, they become the consumers *and* the conveyors of these kinds of stories.

Today's marketplace sees these issues exaggerated and amplified in such a way that marketing appears to hold all the characteristics of culture, with little room for meaning derived elsewhere. The fact is that brands are no longer attached to products as mere stories, but are rather the storytellers themselves (Twitchell, 2004). Branding has actually become a way of "storifying things" (Twitchell, 2004, p. 36), and a clear focus on story and story development is a key to brand success (Sherry, 2005). Consumers then live "narratively" (Fisher, 1989, p. 18) by selecting brand stories they believe to have the greatest appeal. Again, in the absence of other aspects of culture, brands become central determinants of both culture and cultural expectations, especially considering that brands form cultures around their stories.

The Role of Stories in Culture

What seems like consumers willingly accepting marketing methods is likely directly linked to the notion that "humans are storytellers" (Fisher, 1989, p. 5). People evaluate, measure, assess, and critique stories, and so can therefore apply critical methods to brands in the same way. First, stories are assessed through "*narrative probability*, what constitutes a coherent story," and second, through "*narrative fidelity*, whether or not the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives" (Fisher, 1989, p. 5). By nature, humans are storytellers; they gravitate toward stories in order to make sense of their lives. Since brands allow consumers choice, they copy the same kinds of assessments that humans might make of stories.

It is quite clear that "humans are storytellers" (Fisher, 1989, p. 5). The thing is, "humans are [also] consumers by nature" (Twitchell, 1999, p. 22). Combined with the idea that humans are viewed as the "symbol-using animal" (Burke, 1966, p. 5), we see the perfect recipe for brands to take hold and find their place in culture. In fact, it would be more surprising if they did not. Brands function like symbols, brands tell stories, and brands are readily available for consumption.

When stories become so central to marketing, it should come as no surprise that "consumer culture…focuses on community. Fit in, don't stand out. Be cool. The standard of judgment becomes the ability to interact effectively with others, to win their affection and admiration—to merge with others of the same lifestyle. Can he consume the right brands?" (Twitchell, 2002, p. 6). By assessing and selecting stories, and by identifying symbols, brands become about identity, image, and recognition, feeding directly into their place in culture. Objects become a way to show the world your culture, as well as what you yourself actually stand for (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Quite simply, brands are a way for people to communicate.

Objects specifically have "two modalities: *differentiation* and *integration*," the first of which "stresses the unique qualities of the owner," and the second which "represents dimensions of similarity between the owner and others" (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981, p. 39). The latter is a key issue because people worry about not being included and accepted by others (Sennett, 1976). Brands allow people a way to prevent such a reality, especially since succeeding in consumption has to do with having discriminating taste. Buying what is appropriate is key, and so consumption becomes an outlet for communal belonging.

Communities can establish themselves through the way consumers come to negotiate their brand and product choices. Twitchell (1999) believed that "consumers are rational" (p. 22), as they are well aware that, when they purchase products, they are paying in large part for the brand and not just the product. Since goods really can show how consumers actually function and understand themselves in society (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981), brands are one way consumers come to gauge stories and other consumers. By purchasing and consuming certain brands and not others, there is a selectivity taking place that is based on consumer choice (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996; Williams, 1980). Consumers can show how they come to take to certain stories—and subsequent communities—and not others.

Postman (1992) provided a somewhat different definition of narrative as “a story of human history that gives meaning to the past, explains the present, and provides guidance for the future” (p. 172). Characteristically, this is a how a culture comes to compose and construct itself (Postman, 1992). In Postman’s (1992) estimate, narratives are absolutely essential for the well-being of culture.

Is narrative value for objects a viable term then? Let us begin by taking a look at the way brands might contribute to culture and narrative. Leiss, Kline, and Jhally (1990) spoke of how all cultures will use objects to symbolize culture in one way or another. Given that a choice is made when it comes to brand consumption and “any choice between goods is the result of, and contributes to, culture” (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996, p. 52), the brand has a cultural dimension that may parallel objects of similar characteristics in the past. The difference in our society today, as mentioned previously, is simply that consumption takes the biggest cultural role (Twitchell, 1999).

The bottom line: objects alone are not enough. They must be more than what they are. According to Douglas and Isherwood (1996), consumers will never be satisfied with products as they are; rather, products must be used as a form of communication that ultimately provides meaning. Actually, without messages designed to influence the masses, we would not be able to reach a state of “cooperation” (Bernays, 1928, p. 37), which is important considering we have strong awareness of others (MacIntyre, 1999). While this is nothing new, “what separates us as a modern culture from much of the rest of the world is not that we are able to hold an array of different versions of the same object but that we are able to hold an incredible number of different versions of the same stories" (Twitchell, 2004, p. 30). At any given time, too, stories are in competition (Fisher, 1989).

In both embracing and selecting multiple storylines, consumers display a willingness to embrace works of fiction, and to go back and forth between the fiction and reality (Twitchell, 2004). A relationship with stories and brands must also be enduring, since brands are often embraced due to experiences with them, which is how the brands then come to be known (Travis, 2000). Successful brands become sort of like traditions for consumers, though this is derived more from consumer behavior than what marketers can accomplish, carving out an identity the consumer can grasp onto.

Take, for example, the way that brand stories embed themselves in our lives. Ricoeur (trans. 1988) discussed the idea of "trace," which means that things can leave "marks" which extend beyond the physical lifespan of the thing (p. 119). When the thing is no longer around, it will still linger; that is to say, it leaves an impression (Ricoeur, trans. 1988). Marketing practitioners attempt to tie brands to our thoughts and memories in a similar way, hoping we will recall them when faced with a purchase opportunity.

While Ricoeur (trans. 1988) explained his idea of trace with an emphasis on family members, friends, or pets, for example, who might pass away and leave an impression on us, there is similar application for brands in the sense that brands can create similarly lasting memories which outlive product life. Ricoeur (trans. 1988) articulated that "the trace can be wiped out, for it is fragile and needs to be preserved intact" (p. 120). Perceptions and understandings of things can be present without the things being physically present (Ricoeur, trans. 1988). Marketing practitioners know this, and therefore want consumers to come into contact with brand stories in numerous ways, in order to keep them constantly fresh in our minds so they are not forgotten.

In a manner of speaking, brand stories take on a life of their own, and people become reflections of their objects—or reflected in their objects. According to Twitchell (1999), marketing practices are mostly successful because they focus on selling meaning rather than particular products—this is done to promote life choices around brands. The brand becomes a dimension of the self, communicating the self in an almost inseparable way.

Meanings in Objects

These aspects of brands are not so different from meanings found in objects historically. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) claimed that objects augment people’s lives and identities in ways that people could not achieve in the absence of objects. This can be done today because “marketers, consumers, public policy makers, and consumerists are engaged in a perpetual game of discovering, creating, translating, transforming, and reconfiguring meaning” (Sherry, 2005, p. 40). The formula works and is effective simply because people want to gain meaning and understanding anywhere they can manage to find it (Fortini-Campbell, 2003). According to Douglas and Isherwood (1996), choices in consumption become fully dependent on culture and can actually provide guidelines on how to live and who to be. Marketers must have a clear and concrete understanding of culture and context in order to tap into consumer mentality with marketing (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996).

Goods provide consumers with a way to make sense of culture, and thus the focus in marketing is on what the goods can communicate (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996).

Goods, in the most direct sense, are “a nonverbal medium for the human creative faculty” (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996, pp. 40-41). Why brands are so important in culture is because they market ideas, but the ideas then become commonly understood among large groups of people (Twitchell, 2004).

This discussion, however, is not meant to suggest that people revolve their lifestyles in full around the brands they consume. Twitchell (2004) labeled “brand stories” as “microfictions” (p. 44), clearly in an effort to differentiate them as a fiction; as something separate from what might be culturally bound to an object. The sentiment is in line with Fisher’s (1989) explanation that “narration” is something fundamentally distinct from “fictive composition” (p. 58). In addition, Travis (2000) called brands “metaphorical stories,” that attach themselves to a “human appreciation of mythology” (p. 7); each perspective suggests that brand stories, which operate as works of fiction, are different from stories otherwise bound to tradition and culture.

The dilemma in resolving this argument is found in what brands have the capacity to produce; what they actually generate through marketing practices. Sennett (1976) said that “because we have come to expect…psychological benefits throughout the range of our experience, and precisely because so much social life which does have a meaning cannot yield these psychological rewards, the world outside, the impersonal world, seems to fail us, seems to be stale and empty” (p. 5). Herein is the concern of brands taking on cultural identity the way they do. Since marketing practices are so heavily intertwined with culture, consumers can possibly look at the two as being one in the same, which makes them susceptible to both marketing practices and financial trouble Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). A lack of cultural options has factored into people turning to the marketplace and the economy to find meaning, transcribing cultural offering from the marketplace into the objects they consume—a concern considering the resulting cost of finding culture.

It was Taylor (2007) who said that "fractured cultures find their own way" (p. 299), suggesting that when people are in need of meaning and stories to guide their lives, they will attempt to locate them in whatever way possible in order to make sense of the world. If we accept Postman's (1992) assessment that narratives are vital to culture, we also accept the potential problem of brands. A key characteristic of our time is that humanity has no direction at this moment (Postman, 1999). Without goals and meanings and narratives to move us forward, there is only control (Postman, 1999). In order to thrive, "cultures must have narratives and will find them where they will, even if they lead to catastrophe. The alternative is to live without meaning, the ultimate negation of life itself" (Postman, 1992, p. 173).

As a direct result, people are, in a way, dependent on the marketplace to feel complete (Thames, 2010). Marketing therefore has the power to damage society (Muller, 2002). Once brands creep into the category of actually being culture, they become the strongest foundation for culture—one that is, in reality, not strong at all.

Considering that "brands shape and reflect cultural trends" (Sherry, 2005, p. 41), brands themselves become a possible outlet for making sense of self and others. The primary reason for brands attempting to reflect culture is that brands must be both adaptive and responsive to culture in order to stay relevant and fresh (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990). What ultimately becomes detrimental to culture and consumers is "a linkage of values between quite mundane products and the now generally unattached values of love, respect, significance or fulfillment" (Williams, 1980, p. 193). These things can just not be provided by the marketplace.

The "interpersonal (or social) domains of the consumer, rather than the characteristics of goods, are the vital core of merchandising" (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990, pp. 285-286). Again, there is an expectation of fulfillment consumers have should they choose to consume the correct things (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990). Goods need to be "endowed with life-force" (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990, p. 310) in order to take on this role, which is a drastic move that significantly separates the goods from their use value.

Although marketing practitioners imbue products with social and cultural meaning, there is still a contrast in produced brands when compared with cultural meanings found elsewhere. Leiss, Kline, and Jhally (1990) stated that "in earlier societies, individuals became acquainted with the meanings carried by objects through cultures and customs. In a consumer society, needs and commodities must be introduced by some other means" (p. 327). Though just a slight point of departure, this comparison does suggest a different point of origin—marketing, in this case—even if the point of origin does not greatly affect the end result of the meaning granted to an object—a meaning that would impact exchange value.

Unfortunately, an accurate depiction of culture would be to look at it outside the scope of the marketplace alone (Williams, 1980), though this might be increasingly difficult for consumers to realistically do. How, then, are these additional components of culture actually defined? Fisher (1989) further characterized his idea on narrative as including “intellectual and spiritual communities” (p. 63). Found within these criteria is evidence of something that simply cannot be provided by brands or marketing.

Limitations of Brands

The quality and longevity of a narrative described by Fisher (1989) is at a higher level than what a brand is capable of producing. Within these ideas we see value in things appreciated by culture, though not fully designed as something to affect exchange value of a thing. Ultimately, however, exchange value will still be affected. As in exchange value, the impact through this kind of ascribed meaning is not fixed, but rather is a matter of convention, most apparent when considering the fact that “cultures overlap numerous layers of structured sets of meanings in the same objects” (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990, p. 318).

The marketplace, as it exists today, is not all people rely upon when they seek meaning and value in their lives. Keller and Berry (2003), for example, explained a common characteristic of opinion leaders in society, indicating how they are “motivated by more than material possessions. At the end of the day, family, relationships, ideas, and learning” (p. 106) are central to their lives. Despite the fact that branding and marketing practices can allegedly replace or attempt to stand in for other aspects of life that individuals hold dear, those other aspects nevertheless remain present and important.

We must remember that a characteristic of brands is that they only mirror elements of culture that they then attempt to feed into. Twitchell (1999) said branding “is not [of] objects but consumers” (p. 74). With people and culture at the heart of what objects convey, there is little ability on the part of a brand, as it stands alone, to do much at all besides impact exchange value.

Since true cultural meaning in objects is linked to people, we see one way in which brands are unable to function in a human capacity. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) talked about how "the development of symbols…in a cultural tradition meant that people could compare their actions with those of their ancestors to anticipate new experiences" (p. 21). Certainly, brands can have a tradition of success and longevity, as well as a history; they cannot, however, be directly bound to the actions of ancestors.

In contrast to the potential capacity of the brand is the capacity of the culturally bound object. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) also mentioned that "one might wonder if signs or symbols refer only to things such as crucifixes, trophies, diplomas, or wedding rings, whose main function—if they, indeed, have any—is to *represent* something like religion, achievements, or relationships" (p. 20). This statement discounts brands completely and focuses on symbolism of objects with little use value, though the follow-up example is more to our point: "presumably, [the] symbolic meaning of the spear, or of any other expressive object, is not simply to reflect an already existing actuality. It also helps bring that actuality about" (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981, p. 27).

Within this outlook we find the idea that objects with culturally constructed meaning can actually create culture around them; brands, though, cannot, since they only mirror the culture as it exists. Even though brands are designed with promises that can connect to consumers emotionally, brands still lack the ability to actually create cultural meanings. As integral parts of cultural and tradition, objects can deliver on what cultural expectation prescribes. Truthfully, "if the financial system has a defect, it is that it reflects and magnifies what we human beings are like…money amplifies our tendency to overreact, to swing from exuberance when things are going well to deep depression when they go wrong" (Ferguson, 2008, p. 13). The instability of convention and exchange value means that communities formed around them in some way can easily falter and crumble.

The community aspect that brands supposedly invite is therefore very much up for debate. While brands can generate communities, in a sense, they can do little to stabilize and maintain communities. Communities forged through brand recognition and brand identity are extremely fragile. Sennett (1976) said that "community feeling formed by the sharing of impulses has the special role of reinforcing the fear of the unknown" (p. 310). The constant need to belong accented by the uncomfortable feeling of needing to be on top of the latest trends is a stressful experience for individuals. In other words, "if people have new impulses, the community will then shatter; they will not be sharing the same feelings; the person who changes 'betrays' the community; individual derivation threatens the strength of the whole" (Sennett, 1976, p. 311).

A community that is formed in this way is always in turmoil. There is a lack of a common "center," which is characteristic of strong communities, wherein the individuals within the community have affiliations with the center (Buber, trans. 1992); instead, the community will have nothing of substance pulling it together. The community can fall apart at the drop of a hat, and its members will likely have constant anxiety over what the community is, what the community will be, and even how they can continue to stay in it.

Let us look at narrative value one last way. According to Douglas and Isherwood (1996), "In most cultures reported over the world, there are certain things that cannot be sold or bought…everywhere there is at least a notion of some area of untrammeled individual choice" (p. 37). There are simply things that, though they may be valued in exchange, cannot be priced.

Douglas and Isherwood (1996) further emphasized this point when they said, "It is all right to send flowers to your aunt in the hospital, but never to send the cash they are worth with the message to "get yourself some flowers"; all right to offer lunch or drinks, but not to offer the price of a lunch or a drink" (p. 38). They explained how this illustrates the way that "in our society the line between cash and gift is so carefully drawn" (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996, p. 38). The point is that, despite the exchange value, cultures can prescribe meaning in certain objects and make them valuable, though in a way this is fully removed from the marketplace and the actual price of the objects.

Narrative value demonstrates a way to look at exchange value, offering an opportunity to round out and further explore Aristotle's notions of use value and exchange value. Brands are storied abstracts, reflective of culture and having exchange value fully dependent on context; however, they are only capable of reflecting culture. Cultural practices emerge around objects that are steeped in tradition, and therefore serve to develop culture around them.

In addition, some cultures will value objects for specific reasons and purposes, and yet not price those objects, so exchange value is not the full picture of their worth. As stated by Ewen (2001), "Social change cannot come about in a context where objects are invested with human subjective capacities. It cannot come about where commodities contain the limits of social betterment. It requires that people never concede the issue of who shall define and control the social realm" (p. 220).

Price and profit cannot be the central drivers of culture if the culture is to be healthy. At the same time, the dominant roles in a culture cannot come from objects; rather, they need to come from people. Even if we are to accept that objects are important for humankind, they cannot control humankind. Brands and culture can certainly be present within objects, as objects contain within them meaning that is beyond their function. Exchange value only makes sense if humans evaluate contexts and meanings. At the same time, however, humans cannot allow objects to run their lives and materialism should not form the basis of culture.

If taken to an extreme, materialism—especially through brands—allows individuals to feel false senses of belonging, as well as direction. Culturally, objects are capable of gaining meaning in much more steadfast and concrete ways. The value placed on life is outside the realm of the value placed on objects, however, and so objects should be pushed into secondary roles.

For example, if an individual had an object with great cultural significance, and there were events that led to the destruction of the object, culture itself is not destroyed. The traditions and experiences that have been infused into the object will not be lost if the object is, which further suggests why it is problematic for objects to be put into a primary position. Even if the object is irreplaceable, the meanings generated from the object still exist outside of it. Whether brands have such power is up for debate.

In some key ways, brands and culture outside the marketplace are quite similar, which is why they together are factors that can influence exchange value. Instead of looking at the two as completely different, I would posit that the reason they are so similar is because they ascribe meaning into objects in similar ways. Use value, which is more internal in the sense that it is according to natural properties of an object, is really the distinct characteristic.

Exchange value, being according to convention and therefore context, is really about external factors and standards. When an object is made and has an intended use, the object takes on a characteristic and value because of that use. The use cannot then be separated from the object.

Exchange value, which both brands and culture can impact, is removed from use value. Even if an object's use is more valued at one time or place compared with another, it is still according to an external and context-sensitive evaluation. The concept of brands and narrative value are also external standards—placed by consumers, marketers, or some combination of the two. When it comes time to exchange an object, whether by trade or money, use value is important, but external standards which provide objects with additional meaning will affect the value in exchange.

Since humans are so inclined toward stories and since use value is often not enough to drive meaning, humans cannot be without cultural and branded objects. Experiences, memories, and tradition can easily be recounted by looking at and valuing objects. Objects are extremely important for humankind, yet in different capacities.

Brands and marketing today have infiltrated the cultural realm, and are therefore not easily distinguished or detached from it. Brands, however, are lacking the substance that other aspects of culture can provide. Marketers make great efforts to seamlessly connect brand experiences with culture, but just because brands can connect with culture does not mean they are necessarily the same as culture itself.

Before the argument becomes too negative toward marketing and brands, however, I need to clarify that the problem is not with brands but rather with culture fully formed around them. What is apparent in looking at brands, use value, exchange value, and narrative value is that objects must be there; they must be present in our lives. We need objects for functional purposes, and we also need objects to stand for something. The problem is the trappings of a culture formed around brands because of the need for stories and guidance.

Let us review the ideas that make narrative value an important concept, one that affects exchange value in much the same way brands do. Since meaning can be ascribed to objects through culture and marketing, both will impact the way people value objects in an exchange—for better or worse. By contrasting the capacity of the brand, I hope to give credence to narrative value, which is something much different. Again, the purpose of this work is not to offer a third value to Aristotle's ideas, but rather to look at some effects on exchange value.

As mentioned previously, brands are really fictions (Twitchell, 2004). Culture outside of the marketplace is much more steeped in reality, calling upon meanings that people have imbued into objects through legends, experiences, and morals. While stories can certainly be mythical in cultures outside the marketplace, the marketplace does not have the ability to create in the same capacity.

The easiest way to think of marketing is as a story within a story. While marketing practices do look to culture for inspiration, they do not seem so savvy in actually making culture. Our prior example of American Eagle shows a brand that attempts to tap into youth culture by showing images of teens on the beach and having fun. American Eagle did not create that culture. Instead, the brand is mirroring what it believes youth culture to already be. Brands are really nothing more than mirrors, and so are characterized as fictions. Brands are therefore flimsy at best, and, while interesting to consumers because they have cultural markers, should not be taken as culture.

Despite the fact that individuals may be susceptible to the influential power of marketing, they should not build culture and community around it. While the marketplace can make promises to consumers, it cannot deliver the same kinds of meanings and feelings in life that interpersonal connections can (Keller & Berry, 2003). Brands are becoming more and more personified in marketing, but they cannot grant happiness to consumers. In fact, they are designed not to.

Consumers are not really meant to feel happy (Marcuse, 1964) through their purchases. With no genuine meaning available through consumption, consumers will always want more. While interpersonal connections have the potential to make people happy and fulfilled, brands are designed to do just the opposite, a characteristic which should relegate them more to the marketplace than to culture. As constructs that affect exchange value, brands can realistically do little else; their power is one of price, even though they are meant to be within culture and to appeal to specific audiences.

Similarly, brands are unstable in the sense of community, tradition, and Ricoeur's (trans. 1988) idea of trace. First, a community built around a brand—or even identification for individuals as the result of a brand—does not allow for consistent membership due to how brittle brands really are. At any point, a brand can fall, an organization can go bankrupt, a company can be sold. There is no substance holding the community together, so the community lacks the foundation to keep it stable.

Consumption and public image are also important in belonging to a community built around a brand. This is like a membership fee, and one that must be constantly renewed through consumption. The community is constantly critical, then, especially since the market places pressure and expectation on consumers to have specific things. The idea of an “us” against “them” mentality which is characteristic of community (Arnett, 1986, p. 27) is augmented to unrealistic expectation, where consumption is the only real way to avoid being an outsider.

Second, there is a lack of tradition with a brand. Sure, brands have traditions associated with them because of their longevity and reputation. The traditions afforded to brands in this regard, though, are more a result of consumption patterns than they are the brands themselves.

More specifically, if consumers, as opposed to marketing practitioners, are really the ones allowing brands to have tradition, then the objects gain tradition because of people. For example, since marketing practitioners and even scholars have such trouble in defining why consumers gravitate toward certain products and brands and not others, it is likely tradition can have something to do with it. If an individual has parents who happen to use Tide detergent, for instance, he or she may determine that Tide is a good choice and therefore use it.

The Tide detergent would become an object of tradition and even culture because it has meaning associated with the individual’s parents. I would argue this is the best case scenario for a brand to be granted narrative value, insofar that meaning is independent of marketing, though narrative value is still distinct from brand value. The reason brands themselves cannot be looked at as having such tradition is because of the fact that brands need to, for the most part, adapt to changes in context—including changes in culture and competition. The general willingness marketing practitioners have to innovate brands also means there is little obligation to the tradition itself.

Third and finally, Ricoeur's (trans. 1988) idea of trace, which has application to living things, demonstrates the way that brands should not be looked at as things that really matter in life. If someone passes away, the trace they leave is likely not easily forgotten, and not easily replaced by another. Brands, on the other hand, really lack substance, so while their trace is paramount to their success, it can be easily broken and forgotten.

Say, for example, you were to get a pair of shoes you really like—perhaps Nike. You wind up really liking the shoes and are therefore inclined to buy Nikes once more when you need shoes, and so on. Let us say, hypothetically, that Nike goes out of business or you for some reason discover you dislike the brand. Well, it can be easily replaced. You might decide to try Adidas or Converse instead, which exposes the fragility of the trace, and you likely will not care to give Nike much more thought. Hopefully, human connections one makes do not suffer this kind of replacement process.

These characteristics all serve as bases to justify an idea of narrative value over brands. Both are fully capable of affecting exchange value. The use value of a thing plays some role in determining exchange value, but other factors that are sensitive to context ascribe meaning to objects and affect exchange value, too. Brands and narrative value, which do not have substance and which are not specifically related to use, show us how today Aristotle might find and identify examples of exchange value, which is relevant not only to the marketplace, but in terms of how life generates meaning in objects, as well.

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