

Impact of social structural change on brands

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Master Thesis

Management of Creative Industries

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to understand the influence of the transformation of society from 20th century industrial capitalism towards postmodernism and cultural capitalism has had on brands. It examines changes that professional brand management has undergone in recent times in order to remain relevant for customers.

In the course of industrial capitalism towards cultural capitalism there has been a change from standardization and rationality to individualization, emotions, experience and "the special" in everyday life. To what extent have brands followed this development, what changes in structure, content and interaction resulted from it? And have brands, which fail to adapt, have any chance to survive in the market? By interviewing experts from German advertising and branding agencies, this thesis investigates to what extent the concept of singularization is already applied in brand practice and where possible gaps could still mean potential for brand management.

The following research question was developed for this purpose:

How is the transformation of society from the industrial capitalism of the 20th century towards a postmodern 'cultural capitalism' of the 21st century, reflected in the contemporary practice of brands and which aspects have been disregarded so far by brand practitioners?

This research question consists of two parts. The first part will be answered by the literature part. These form the basis for the practical part of the work, in which the findings on social change are operationalized and hypotheses are put into practice. This serves to answer the second part of the research question, which deals with the extent to which brand practitioners are already using the singularities in brand practice.

List of Abbreviation

POS	Point of Sale
Ibid.	in the same place
i.e.	that is
cf.	confer
f.	following
ff.	following (plural)
n.d	no date
n.a	no author
n.p	no place
B2B	Business to Business
fig.	figure
e.g	for example

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Figure 1:

„Die Sinus Milieus in Deutschland 2001-2010“.
<https://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/bildung/kulturelle-bildung/59917/kulturbegriffe?p=all>. [accessed 25.08.2019]

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Sinus Institute. „Sinus 2015“. Available at:
https://www.sinus-institut.de/fileadmin/user_data/sinus-institut/Bilder/sinus-mileus-2015/2015-09-23_Sinus-Beitrag_b4p2015_slide.pdf.
[accessed 25.08.2019]

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1. Introduction

1.1 The fear of brand professionals for brand burnout

1.1.1 The rapid loss of trust in big brands

“More brands than ever before are entirely dispensable [...] More and more brands are losing the trust of the consumer and are therefore on the verge of a burnout.” (Rentz, 2019)

The advertising, brand, and marketing industry has been in turmoil for several years now. Studies of advertising, brand, and marketing agencies are overturning with announcements of the impending ‘brand downfall’. At the beginning of 2019, a study by the Havas agency group stated that

[...] “a staggering 77 percent of the brands could disappear - and nobody would care. Since the start of the study in 2008, this is the highest measured percentage and is an increase of three percent compared to 2017 figure.” (Koch, 2019)

Branch studies, such as those of the Havas Group, identify an alleged extreme need for change in the everyday praxis of brand and advertising. However, one must view this course of action with caution. It can be assumed, that a large number of these studies were primarily produced to create a higher demand for agencies and their expertise in branding and marketing. One theory from the industry regarding the declining numbers, states that insufficient marketing and

advertising budgets are the main cause of the problem:

[...] “several major companies, including Mondelez [...], Beiersdorf, [...] Unilever, Kraft-Heinz [...] and Henkel have now announced plans to invest additional budgets in marketing. In the medium term, hopefully, an overspending of hundreds of millions of euros will prevent further loss in value.” (Koch, 2019)

This explanatory attempt can be insufficient and is also questionable. The agency group ‘Serviceplan’ (in cooperation with the pollster ‘GfK’) outlined the factors behind “*brand burn-out*” in 2013 and 2016 with factors such as: a lack of cross-media media plans, a lack of general channel marketing and a lack of real-time data analysis in marketing (cf. GfK/Serviceplan, 2016) among press related industries. In 2018, the follow-up study explained that brands are lacking “charisma”. (cf. Gründel, 2019) Within a climate of recent debate regarding sustainability and microplastics, for example Serviceplan and GfK explain the strong performance of the detergent brand “Frosch” cryptically with its ‘meaningful positioning’. (cf. GfK/Serviceplan, 2016)

However, industry studies primarily serve the self-branding of the commissioning companies. In recent years, agency brands are increasingly experiencing more problems, which can no longer be simply solved by a clever use of media or pricing.

1.1.2 No brand performance without brand meaning

In line with this, it is increasingly being stated in the industry that the hope, that “performance marketing” would be able to replace all content issues of brand management with “technology” was obviously premature, as consumers are

confronted with rising numbers of advertising messages and are therefore becoming highly desensitized to them. Digitalization, with its innumerable channels and ways of addressing consumers is a driving force behind the development of consumers into 'advertising avoiders'. (cf. Koch, 2019) The marketing professor Mark Ritson, who has been quoted in the magazine 'Wirtschaftswoche,' identifies this process as the reason for the decreasing effectiveness of marketing and the declining impact of advertising. (cf. Koch, 2019)

In the context of the current debate surrounding 'performance', 'algorithms' and automation in marketing, vs. 'brand sense', one can recall a similar polarization that occurred in the 1990s. At the time, marketing departments were pinning their hopes on the POS. The belief at the time was that with the right 'shelf placement', expensive brand management and design could be avoided altogether. (cf. Schwab, 2015)

The question of 'brand content and sense offer' - vs. 'performance' in marketing can be identified as a recurring one. However, there is reason to believe, that, through digital transformation, brand management is currently undergoing an 'epochal change', not only on the 'technical' but also on the 'contextual' side. 'Meaningful Brands' by Havas, a study of the marketing sector in 2015, investigated people's expectations of brands and stated:

"Brands need to provide sense in order to be successful in the long term," Havas writes. Furthermore,; *"In addition to the pure functional product value, brands also have to convey the personal experience for consumers and the social benefits of their products to customers."* ("Branche," 2015)

Since Jürgen Habermas (1990), it seems to be proven, that new media eras do not only contain new forms and technical channels but also new communicative content. Consequently these changes in medial eras are the answers to new social communication requirements. The structural transformation of the media is a symptom of the structural change of society . (cf. Habermas, 1990, p. 201 ff.)

One thing is certain: 'The world of brands' has become fragile. 'Brands' as a sales tool no longer have the function and clout that they used to. Consumer society and consumer brands no longer 'get along' with each other as they did in past decades. What are the reasons for these fundamental changes?

1.2 Problem Statement

Since the beginning of the industrial age, brands were supposed to make the sale of mass products reliable and predictable. Brands should create resonance to achieve economical feedback - i.e., ensure mass sales of standardized products. But for some years now, the confidence placed on brands, from what has become an increasingly broad consumer group, has begun to collapse.(cf. Grzesiak, 2018, p. 44)

This could be caused by a fundamental social change that rewards individualism. Individuality, at first glance, contradicts the essence of brands, whose purpose fundamentally lies within the industrial standardization of products and product characteristics. (cf. Grzesiak, 2018, p. 44) The Sinus Institute, for example, abrogates the 'post-material' milieu between 2010 and 2015, after years of a growing number of the population prescribing to this Sinus Milieus.. The milieu of the 'post-materialists' has, has literally executed itself by growing to a critical mass, , as the Sinus Institute argues analogously (see: (cf. "Sinus 2015," 2015). Today, in an increasingly 'post-material' time, the 'post-materialist' is apparently almost insignificant.

See "Sinus Milieus 2010" vs. "Sinus Milieus 2015":

Die Sinus-Milieus® in Deutschland 2001 bis 2010

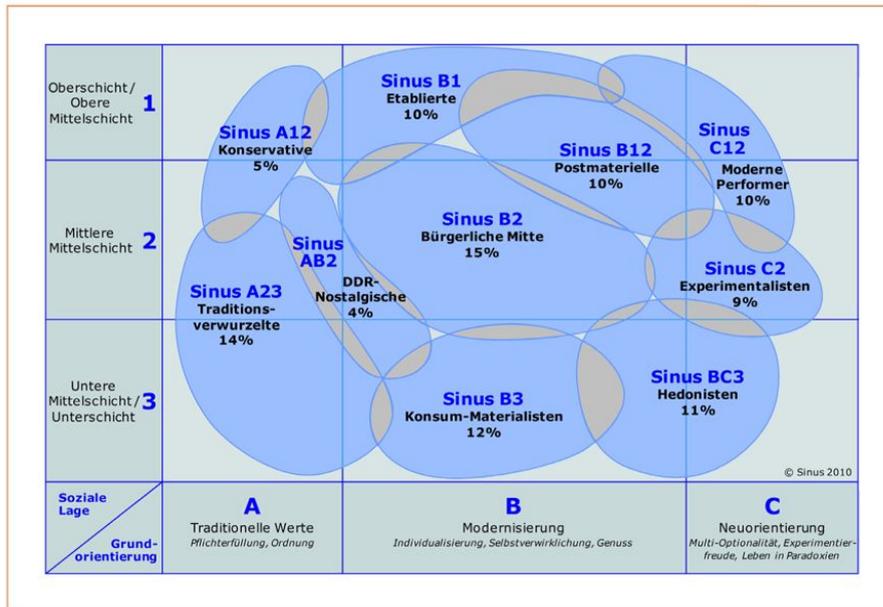


Fig. 1: Source Federal Agency for Civic Education: ("Die Sinus Milieus in Deutschland

2001-2010," 2010.)

Die Sinus-Milieus® in Deutschland 2015

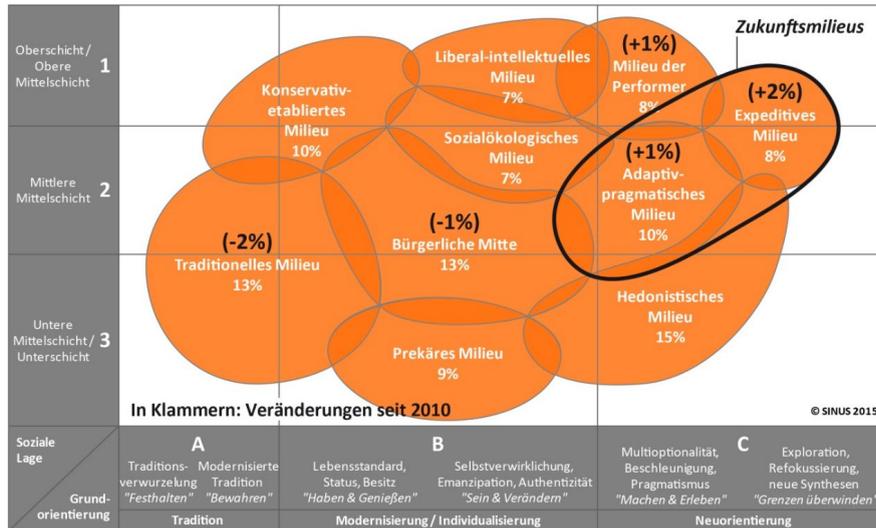


Fig. 2: Source Sinus Institut: ("Sinus 2015," 2015)

This brings to question how practices and the practitioners of brand management are able to respond to a societal change (individualization) that contradicts the initial branding purpose that lies in the marking of standardized products within a rational society (standardization) (see chapter 2.3.1 and 2.3.2)

This work does not claim to be a representative presentation of marketing practices, nor is it intended to explain different branding styles and to compare their performance. The intention is to provide an overview of social and economic changes and to investigate the resulting question, what consequences for the 'theoretical brand construct' might occur.

As described in the introduction, experts find it challenging to identify a clear cause for the dwindling resonance of brands. Therefore, this thesis strives for an interdisciplinary look into adjacent fields of science. Often, the media theory,

sociology or social science provides a more advanced description of the current media and social change, than the brand and marketing theory and practice. Thus, on the one hand, relevant parts of the theory-building from these adjacent fields will be used to identify "white spots" on the map of the brand theory. On the other hand, the aim is to determine the effectiveness of contemporary social sciences within brand management practice in relation to explaining the transformation that is taking place in the field of brands.

1.3 Knowledge Interest

This thesis will outline the argument that brand management is currently facing larger problems than only individual symptoms of a change of society, that are reflected in the brand practice. In conjunction with this, the extent to which these symptoms underlie a structural change in society and to what extent brand practice deals with this change will be explored.

To paraphrase, this forms the question: "To what extent does the theory of media and society reflect the current media and social change in brand practice?"

The goal is to describe and localise potential fields of investigation and to outline where marketing practice has gaps in comparison to contemporary social science and where these assumed discrepancy are already beginning to close.

1.4 Research Question

Thus the research question driving this thesis is:

How is the transformation of society from the industrial capitalism of the 20th century towards a postmodern 'cultural capitalism' of the 21st century, reflected in

the contemporary practice of brands and which aspects have been disregarded so far by brand practitioners?

2. Literature Research

In the previous chapter of this work, the term "brand", has been mentioned a few times. Although this term can cover a wide spectrum of meanings, and thus can sometimes even be used contradictory in theoretical literature, it is essential for the purposes of this thesis, to define the term "brand" within this piece of work, as well as to investigate its relationship to economic history.

2.1. Brand

2.1.1 The "essence" of brands in the course of time

2.1.1.1 Branding goods to 'mark' them

Although the German term for "brand" originates from the Greek term 'marka,' the English term "brand" derives from the [Old English] word 'brandr' or "to burn" (cf. Theobald, 2017, p. 5).

What both etymologies have in common, is their original reference to the practice of branding livestock with a burning iron (later on, it was also used to mark goods) or to 'mark' pathways, personal belongings or items in general. (cf. Holland, 2017)

The origin of the word 'brand' appears early in human history and was found in most high cultures.

One example of this originates from 330 B.C., in Greece. Trading goods was a daily pastime, and the streets often denoted the names of the respective goods that were being sold there. This made it easier for buyers to find the products they were looking for. In addition to this, the clustering of guilds also aided the control of quality and price. Information about the geographical origin was applied to goods via a stamp, a practice that can be described today as a company logo. (cf. Errichiello, 2017, sec. 262 f.)

The next crucial step towards the 'brand' as it is known today, appeared in the 13th century. Guilds were united. (cf. Errichiello, 2017, sec. 356 f.) Goods were marked with the sign of a guild, which also provided an informative value for the buyers of the goods. The signs of these guilds or professional associations represented a certain quality standard and manufacturing process. Hence, this trademark of the guilds was also used as a figurehead and was one of the first forms of advertising to have been used. These signs could influence buying decisions and therefore fulfilled a very basic function of today's advertising. However, advertising, especially for members of the guilds was strongly prohibited. A similar restriction was imposed for producing goods in an amount that exceeded the basic needs of the population. (cf. Errichiello, 2017, sec. 360 ff.) Later on, the first paper watermarks were used to mark products in Italy (cf. Grzesiak, 2018, p. 8).

2.1.1.2 A Brand as a 'quality marker'

Following this, in 1963 Konrad Mellerowicz described a mark as a sign put onto a goods for the purpose of distinguishing them from other competing offers (cf. Mellerowicz, 1963, p. 39). In the course, the source of a product became assigned to its manufacturer and thus automatically to the quality that was associated with this manufacturer. (cf. Theobald, 2017, p. 13) Hence this

definition of Mellerowicz still focused on the 'qualitative marking' of a product. Germany first published its trademark law in 1995, and the legislation references the notion of 'qualitative marking'. In its current version, published in 2018, trademarks are described in the following way:

(1) "All signs, particularly words including personal names, designs, letters, numerals, sound marks, three-dimensional designs, the shape of goods or of their packaging as well as other wrapping, including colours and colour combinations, may be protected as trade marks if they are capable of distinguishing the goods or services of one enterprise from those of other enterprises.

(2) Signs consisting exclusively of a shape

- 1. which results from the nature of the goods themselves;*
- 2. which is necessary to obtain a technical result; or*
- 3. which gives substantial value to the goods*

shall not be capable of being protected as trade marks."

(§3 Abs. 1, MarkenG) (n.a, 2019)

While §3 Abs. 1 u. 2 refers to the classical qualitative dimensions of brands, as described by Mellerowicz (1963), Abs. 3 beacon the brand concept in a direction, that it also took after 1963 in the scientific debate. Since the 1970s and 1980s, the term was charged with numerous and throughout more abstract dimensions. The meaning of 'a substantial value' thus no longer refers only to "mechanical" characteristics of a product. "An essential value' can also refer to intangible dimensions such as an 'image value'.

2.1.1.3 From mechanical quality to intangible brand characteristics

In 2001, the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR) described the concept of 'image' factor in one of their definitions of brand. It broadened the notion of brand to include 'values'. However, these values are still directly related to the product, and are used purely for the purpose of product differentiation, and thus form a guide for the consumer (cf. ESOMAR, 2001):

“A product or service to which human beings attach a bundle of tangible (functional product and service characteristics) and intangible (emotional and/ or symbolic) meanings that add value. A brand has one strategic purpose and that is to differentiate itself from competitors.” (ESOMAR, 2001)

2.1.1.4 The brand as a product itself

In 2002, Rob Shields pointed out that the meaning of brands transcends product differentiation and the promise of certain features attributed to the purchased good. Brands themselves have become an "intangible goods" (cf. Shields, 2002, p. 177), and have developed to become commodities themselves and therefore are invaluable economically to companies.

Shields also refers to brands as a *"form of guarantee against risk"*, and this guarantee manifests itself in a logo. From the logo *"the full range of meanings that might be associated with a commodity [are encapsulated] into a symbol."* (Shields, 2002, p. 177)

Interestingly, Shields limits the appearance of the brand to the logo. As a result, this definition is narrower than that used in the definition of the German legislature, which also accredits numbers, sounds and three-dimensional shapes as brands. Current trends such as the audio branding of large brands have been respected in the German legislation. (cf. Carl-Frank, 2019)

In this sense Celia Lury goes further with her definition of brands. She describes a modern brand, as *“dynamic, multi layered and open-ended”* and draws a line of comparison that leads her to brands as *“new media object”* (cf. Lury, 2004, p. 3).

“The brand, in its contemporary format could be understood as a new media object. Emerging at the intersection of the drivers histories of computing, information technology and media as well as those of economics, marketing and design the brand embodies the logic of the new media.” (Lury, 2004)

Furthermore, to Lury brands are an ‘interface’ between producers and consumers. Lury justifies this definition with the interactivity between producer and consumer, as an example of what she states is *‘typical of new media in general.’* This makes a brand into a key example of the status of objects in the informational age, and gives an idea of the spirit that the current form of capitalism tends to pursue, which is open-ended and in active relation to the consumer (cf. Lury, 2004, p. 3 f.).

2.1.1.5 From ‘product value’ to ‘additional value’

Over the years, the brand purpose changed from marking the ‘product value’, towards charging a brand with ‘additional value.’

The product or primary value describes the minimum that a service or product has to fulfill and refers only to functional attributes.

With the peak of the industrialization, the continually growing number of products exacerbated the competition. (c.f Errichiello, 2017, sec. 581 f.) Since the competing products then no longer recognizably differed in their features, the brands were charged with additional benefits in order to create a clearly recognizable differentiation for the consumer. The additional benefit was based on the satisfaction of mental and spiritual needs and was initially closely related to the product and its features (e.g., car=freedom/coolness/ status). This 'charging' with additional value was created through communication in the form of advertising. (cf. Grzesiak, 2018, p. 44)

Although at first sight 'brand' seems to be a term without a clear definition. The direction in which it was developing is clearly recognizable. Brands have moved further away from the product benefit, and rather towards becoming a general 'value creator' (more on this in Chap. 2.1.2).

Today, brands are a tool for communication for both businesses, as well as for consumers. This results in brands whose value is no longer only 'created' by the company itself, but is also 'charged' by and through the consumer. (cf. Heun, 2012, secs. 376, 378)

This development was not a 'coincidence of history', but a response to the transformation of the economic systems

2.1.2 The individual dimension: brands as 'value creator'

Due to the change that took place from industrial capitalism to postmodernism, and as life forms become more pluralized, brands have started to take on more profound and individual forms for the consumer. Brands are no longer only

conveying meaning that is suitable for the masses, but are steadily becoming a tool for identity development and impacting almost all areas of western life. (cf. Heun, 2012, sec. 398 f.)

The needs of the people and what creates meaning and value for them, naturally undergoes a change through the shifts in society and its structural developments. (see chapter: 2.2.). In the 1990s, the desire for a Mercedes as a symbol for , to highlight that one is living in prosperity and therefore attaining a certain status in society, however in the postmodern era this has shifted to more intangible values. If the Mercedes served as a symbol for livelihood security, postmodernist brands contribute to the creation of one's own identity and self-fulfillment in a different way. Brands become symbolically charged, with ever more complex values, according to the people that were defined as the target group. This 'charging' of the brand is no longer only possible through the strategic positioning and communication of the respective company. (Heun, 2012, sec. 399 ff.) Increasingly, brands are understood as something that can be '*located primarily on the side of the consumer and in the minds of consumers.*' (Heun, 2012, sec. 402) The result of this is the lapse of is the old notion that the symbolic power of brands is entirely under the control of the companies themselves. (cf. Heun, 2012, sec. 402 f.)

For Helene Karmasin, a brand includes every aspect that can be read and interpreted. Thus, to a brand belongs a world view and the discourses in which the brand participates and what cultural as well as social aspects it interacts with helps to form this view.

“From the ideological attic, the brand extracts its semantic value, its differentiation, as well as the sense that it takes for the user. Every aspect

of a brand that can be read symbolically is affected." (Karmasin, 1997, p. 124)

It is worth noting that Karmasin's theories were published relatively early (1997), and yet her understanding of brands and the ideologies they can encompass have been so complex and abstract.

If the concept of ideology in the context of brands is optimally chosen - or if it has particular benefit for the further description, should not be assessed here. More importantly for this investigation at this point is the aspect that brands are increasingly charged with "dimensions of meaning" (such as "ideology").

2.1.3 Brands along the 'pyramid of needs'

To better understand the role of the brand as a value creator, it is worth examining the development of consumer needs in conjunction with investigating key aspects that contribute significantly to creating both sense and meaning in peoples lives over the last decades.

As previously mentioned, products were used as symbols to demonstrate the achievement of a well-situated position in life, which created a recognition in social groups and society in general(cf. Arvidsson, 2006, p. 2 ff.)

The needs in today's society are primarily 'individual needs' and revolve around self-realization and identity. A scarcity of resources and the 'fight for survival' has resulted in the lack of capacity for more 'advanced' demands.

The different levels of human needs have classically been hierarchized by Abraham H. Maslow. Based on the basal needs (hunger, thirst, sleep), he created

a model that clarified the human necessities and the basis of motivations. The pyramid ends with the term 'transcendence.' (cf. Dietrich, 2018)

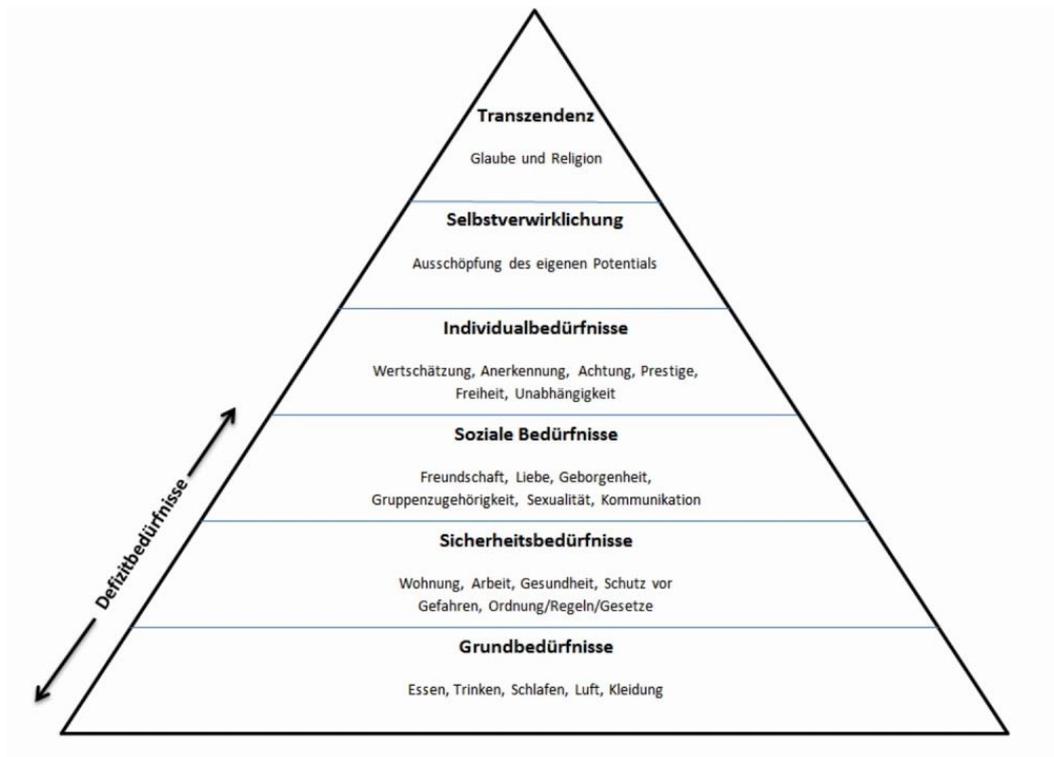


Fig. 3: Maslow's pyramid of needs

Maslow believed that people fulfill a specific need and then develop a new one. (cf. Karmasin, 1997, p. 101) However, the pyramid not only highlights the "development of needs" of an individual, but by comparing the pyramid with the history of brand development, it can be read like a historical outline of the needs that brands have served over time.

2.1.3.1 Basic needs

The first level, and thus the most basic human needs, represents the mere existence of livelihoods. This stage is similar to the original purpose of products which were only produced to support coverage of the most crucial human needs. Marks were only used as a quality sign or for marking belongings. The distinction of products was not crucial because the number of goods was restricted.

This is followed by the need for safety, hence the protection against danger and the need for security. This was associated with financial certainty, and therefore, a secure job. (c.f Oesterdiekhoff, 2001, p. 91)

Social needs, and the desire for belonging and interpersonal contacts, are on the third level of Maslow's pyramid. The symbolic power of the products and brands was used by the consumers, to communicate the coverage of the basic needs to the environment. (c.f Errichiello, 2017, sec. 540 f.)

2.1.3.2 The individual layer of needs

The needs following the first three layers of basic necessities are the individual needs; the desire for recognition, freedom, success, and appreciation. These desires are a crucial part of human growth.(cf. Dietrich, 2018) In a historical context, this is the era of industrial capitalism - the time of brands as status goods.

Industrialization and its technical achievements changed the production of goods, and rather than simply covering the basic demand for goods as before, production now took place in large and outsourced companies. The goods, which

had previously been hand-made, could now be produced on a massive scale. (c.f. Grzesiak, 2018, p. 8)

The market intensified, the number of products increased and advertising was used to attract attention and to get through to the consumer (c.f. Errichiello, 2017, p. 494) Due to the economy of scale - the sheer amount of anonymous products - it became increasingly important to invest in consumer loyalty for the purpose of profitable sales. Manufacturers and retailers started observing that well-known products were selling, and thus, brand and advertising became more crucial. The brand took on a role as a mediator between the seller and the consumer. Through its symbolic character, it was intended to "weaken the anonymity that had developed, and in some cases even dissolve it". (Errichiello, 2017, p. 507) Brands in combination with advertising created trust and strengthened the bond to the product.

The brands, and the messages created, conveyed general stereotypes of a 'desirable life,' that were loaded with symbols like 'success' and 'luck.' They were designed to help meet the need for recognition and appreciation. Consumption within industrial capitalism is socially rewarded. It is the time in which the monetary status symbol became important. (cf. Lenze, 2002, p.184)

2.1.3.3 Self-realization

The fifth level is individual and has a different meaning to every person. Self-realization can be seen as the need, which in today's society is paramount. It can be seen as the time where most people aim to unleash their full personal potential. (cf. Dietrich, 2018) At this point, the pyramid reaches the needs of the postmodern people and gives an impression of what they might search for in

brands.

Initially, this fifth level 'self-realization' was the top of the pyramid, and thus the highest and ultimate goal, or need that humans could have and fulfill. However, in 1970, Maslow added another layer to his pyramid of needs: Transcendence, which can be defined as the search for something higher and superior. (cf. Dietrich, 2018)

Thus, Maslow already took into account the social change and the changing needs that resulted in it. At this pinnacle of the pyramid, brands take on a 'constructive aid to individual, group-specific identity' (cf. Lenze, 2002, p. 193). Hence, brands are used as a tool from the consumer, to realize themselves, to define themselves and to communicate this self-image to the outside world. (cf. Szabo, 2009, p.8)

Wolf-Bertram von Bismarck and Stefan Baumann justified this inclination of people towards brands with the missing 'sense' in their lives, which could be explained by the loss of contour of overarching order patterns. (Lenze, 2002, p. 183) This refers to traditional, superordinate constructs such as religion and family. Wolf-Bertram von Bismarck and Stefan Baumann stated that these constructs have been increasingly replaced by self-definition with and through brands. (cf. von Bismarck and Baumann, 1996, p. 42)

2.1.3.4 Transcendence / Brands as Substitutes for Institutional Sense Creation

Transcendence is the "highest aim" that can be reached within Maslow's pyramid. In every culture, people feel the need to be orientated by a higher authority. In archaic pictorial cultures, one obeys magical laws, in manuscript cultures, it is the institutional-religious constructs and in literary cultures one believes in reason

and rationality. (cf. Lenze, 2002, p.196) According to Malte Lenze, 'charisma' is what replaces previous beliefs. He refers to both key figures (for example stars) as well as brands, as carriers of the 'postmodern charisma' and draws similarities with the archaic image cultures. He defines the 'charisma' as something '*consciously produced*' (cf. Lenze, 2002, p. 196) and has similarities to Andreas Reckwitz's 'Society of Singularities', on whose theory this work will go more into detail in due course. (see chapter 2.3 ff.)

The 'charisma of brands', as Gerd Gerken previously recognized in 1994, offers to fill the gap of meaning, that has arisen through the averting of religion and the disappointment in the values of the early modern age (see following chapters). He exaggerated this further and referred to this lack of meaning as a 'permanent identity crisis of the postmodern people'(cf. Gerken, 1994, p. 402). 'Charisma' of brands can, therefore, at least on a very superficial and temporary level, solve the problems of this crisis of meaning. Presumably, it can be stated that this superficial aspect can also be said about religion and rationalism. Perhaps it is almost the most sincere remedy for the alleged creation of meaning and structure. This approach points out why brands are no longer just a status symbol but part of our everyday life.

Charismatic brands succeed in taking on a unique position in the lives of people, despite the apparent abundance and insensitivity of the markets,. (cf. Lenze, 2002, p.192)

Therefore, if one engages in the thought experiment of reading Maslow as a historical process of 'brand development', some modern brand definitions seem almost naively ignorant of history. For example, Mateusz Grzesiak stated that...

[...] "over the course of a dozen or so years, creators of brands focused on brand identity because they noticed that customers, when making their purchases, steered toward brands and the associations they had with

them—for example, luxury, fun, practical—and not with the products themselves. This trend continues unabated and today it is possible to measure the value of a brand by comparing the expected revenues from a branded product with the expected revenues from a corresponding unbranded product.” (cf. Grzesiak, 2018, p. 9)

Grzesiak's description outlines how perhaps brands had begun to notice that consumers have always read them in a symbolic way. However, it is more likely that the shift from concrete basic needs and the functional value of a brand towards a symbolic status symbol and later on a meaningful value mirrors a historical shift in society.

Although this was not the goal of Maslow's pyramid, it is a viable model to trace the development of brands to the late-postmodern era. However, at this point, the explanatory power of the model ends. It is doubtful that the progressive individualization and fragmentation of brands and markets can be adequately explained with the highest level of 'faith' and 'religion'. 'Transcendence' finds different manifestations today than religious ones.

2.1.4 Findings: Chapter 2.1 'Brands'

Taking a closer look at the development of the term "Brand" over time, shows:

- 1) Until the 17th century (the beginning of industrialization), the production of goods served only to cover basic needs. Production that went beyond that was not accepted. With the onset of industrial capitalism, for the first time in human history, production has gone beyond basic needs. It's the time of standardized mass

production, with the purpose of production for the accumulation of wealth.

- 2) At the height of industrialization, the markets shifted from a strongly demand-oriented and unsaturated market towards a demand-oriented and saturated market.
- 3) Due to the countless competing products on the market, as well as their lack of distinctiveness, companies in high capitalism had to find ways to make their products distinguishable for the consumer. There has been a shift from the differentiation of goods through product-related features (quality, price) to differentiation through recharging. The benefits of brands changed with people's needs.
- 4) As a result, the brand has increasingly become a substitute for higher-level 'sense creator' such as religion and rationalism. Also, a change from values suitable for masses to individual values has taken place.

So, if brands seem to have become a postmodern sense creator, it is necessary to take a closer look at the subsequent theories of postmodernity and ask, "What can create meaning today?". In order to find an answer, it is necessary to look into the more current theory of postmodernism.

2.2. Postmodern reality of life and postmodern sense

2.2.1 Brands replace state, church or ideology

Postmodern people dissolves from the idea of 'one truth' and the incontestability of scientific 'rationality.' The 'truths,' which were still considered certain in

industrial capitalism, are being questioned today. People became more suspicious, and no longer accepted answers by institutions and science uncritically. In general, many of the values of industrial capitalism are almost reversed in postmodernism. (cf. Brown, 1995, p. 166)

“It is a way of looking askance at the world. Postmodernism offers ambiguity where modernists offered certainty, they seek complexity where their predecessors sought simplification, they find disorder where their forebears found order [...] and they challenge convention by refusing to accept the accepted.” (Brown, 1995, p. 166)

The society has detached itself from the "sense creator" of modernity, rationalism and science and the belief in technology. (cf. Brown, 1995, p. 88) Consequently it is obvious that brands can no longer relate their products on features, that were based on the repressed values of industrial capitalism.

The sensual and emotional attributes take place where once the theoretical, standardized and regulated values of industrial capitalism were valued. (cf. Gern, 2003) The consequence is that now everything that can't be proven wrong, for example emotions, and everything that provides an authentic, intense experience, is what the people are striving for. All knowledge, all experience and the whole existence is subject to relativity. (cf. Gern, 2003) Using disputable attributes in communication, such as calling a detergent, the "best" is probably the most fragile way of describing it today. Rational, or rationally criticizable product features such as the quality of product benefit (a detergent that washes particularly white, a car that drives particularly fast, etc.) are less likely in postmodernism to make a product 'attractive' to a consumer and can trigger a buying decision.

The rationality, which was once the superstructural construct of modernity- the belief in science and technology - was unable to answer the sought after

explanations to their questions regarding their existence. After the trust in 'the old institutions' of the 20th century (church, state, science, ideologies) faded. 'Lifestyles' filled the gap that had been created. Lifestyles often expressed themselves in consumer and product orientations. As a result, the economic system partially filled the gaps left by 'the old institutions'. (cf. Lenze, 2002, p. 184)

The preceding chapters have demonstrated that contemporary sense is uncertain, individual, and fragmentary. (Oesterdiekhoff, 2001, p. 57) All of these characteristics would have to make this a rather 'impractical' asset for the day-to-day practice of brand management. So why is it still the scale and goal of today's brand management?

2.2.2. From class society to cultural society

With the end of industrial capitalism and the decline of the influence of the institutions of industrial capitalism, the 'class society' of industrial capitalism has ceased to exist. Michael Jäckel even stated that today we no longer experience an economic class warfare, rather a symbolic one. (cf. Jäckel, 2011, p. 207) Not their place in the industrial production process, but their position around culture, art, and creative production processes gives people social status. Everything that can produce cultural and aesthetic peculiarities adds value. (Reckwitz, 2017a, sec. 2099) Therefore participation in the creative production processes, the links with culture as well as culture bearers is the promised status today (Burger, 1996, p. 5). Therefore in industrial capitalism, the safe well-paid job and the Mercedes in front of the family house has been replaced. The primary needs and their fulfillment are today a symbolic expression of the affiliation of the lower classes.

(cf. Jäckel, 2011, p. 208) In other words another relation from industrial capitalism has been reversed, too.

”Even the modern, open, liberal society is a class society [...], and even if the proletariat no longer exists, there is still the 'prolo', the symbol of threatening social decline. He is despised more than ever by the liberal juste milieu, precisely because he is not a "bearer of culture" and has terrible manners.” (Burger, 1996, p. 5)

Therefore belonging to the cultural and the creative class, is now more important than ever before. Belonging to this 'class' gets remunerated with the most attention, and thus, the biggest social reward. As with all social changes, all changes from a clear and linear structure to selective networking, and the change of contents, the goal is still to receive social recognition. (cf. Kroll, 2013)

As a symbol, culture no longer only belongs to the elite, who were able to afford art and culture but is now a culture of the middle class. (cf. Kroll, 2013) Fragments of this culture are used as a sign to communicate the affiliation to a creative middle class. (cf. Kroll, 2013) However, the symbol of mere affiliation widens, and in addition, it is about the entertainment value of the fragments that are used to express the 'self'. (cf. Reckwitz, 2017a, sec. 1865 f.) The cultural references that are used must have an impact on the emotions and should be composed skillfully as well as authentically. (Reckwitz, 2017a, sec. 2066) This guarantees the perception by others, and the social recognition of the displayed self. If the presentation of the self does not appear as sufficiently creative and unique, no one will recognize and therefore reward the presented identity. (Reckwitz, 2017b, sec. 2039)

Rudolph Burger wrote in 'Culture is not Art' that culture would elevate individuals without liberating them from their actual humiliation. (cf. Burger, 1996, p. 7)

Especially art, as a culture, has always brought people an alleged fulfillment of dreams and supposed freedom. So indeed, art and culture come closest to the desire for self-realization through creative elaboration and thus can be used excellently to create meaning and thereby lead to self-exploitation. (cf. Burger, 1996, p. 8)

What therefore makes "culture" relevant for brand professionals is the potential to produce 'status' and distinction.

2.2.3. Culture capitalism

While industrial capitalism primarily produced industrial goods, the importance of cultural goods in cultural capitalism is rising.(cf. Karmasin, 1997, p. 99) Culture is appropriated and used to fuel the economy. (cf. Reckwitz, 2017a, sec. 2099) Hence culture and economy are no longer mutually exclusive opposites; to some extent, they benefit from each other.(cf. Zizek, 2002, p. 118) However, at this point, the devaluation of the meaning of culture and art, and the self as the greatest capital for self-exploitation should only be briefly mentioned here.

In any case, a fusion of culture and markets or art and markets has taken place. (cf. Szabo, 2009, p. 24)

Like culture, creativity, 'creating' and the process of creation becomes the most important capital for people to assert oneself on the market. (cf. Brown, 1995, p. 81) The constantly rising relevance of the creative economy can hereby be explained. The creative economy is geared towards producing singular goods. (cf. Reckwitz, 2017b, sec. 2066)

Those are by trend the goods, especially in contrast to the ones of industrial capitalism, that contain appreciable components, for the postmodern people.(cf. Gern, 2003)

They arouse in humans sentiments like *joy, excitement, enrichment of the self, the feeling of doing something meaningful*. Therefore cultural goods can be defined as 'affect goods'. (cf. Reckwitz, 2017, sec. 2066)

2.2.4. Sense through creativity/ participation in the process of creation

What was the reason for the development of the role of culture and creativity towards a status symbol? Being creatively active, producing something new out of oneself, whether in works, things or related to the creation of the self, has been neglected especially in industrial capitalism, and then developed into a new ideal since 1980. (cf. Jäckel, 2011, p. 302) At first only as a counterculture, later the craving for the sensual and creative became a desire of the masses. (cf. Kroll, 2013) In creativity, culture and the creation of things, people found the promise to create meaning. On the other hand religion was no longer able to deliver it to the people. (Oesterdiekhoff, 2001, p. 57) Therefore it is today more a necessity and compulsion in order to create a balance. Society is no longer oriented towards institutional and standardized structures but finds sense in a very fragmented, individual structure. (cf. Kroll, 2013) Therefore the economy has made use of the desire of the masses for creativity and self-fulfillment through creation, meaning and motivation. Because the economy has made this change, or rather the need for emotions and sensual perception its own, all of this is not only sought but also expected in all areas. Today there is almost no area that is excluded from the compulsion of affects and creativity. (Sacco, 2013, p. 7) It is about the creation of sensually emotional moments, no matter whether in the media, in private life, in politics or business. In order to be recognized, it has to affect. (cf. Kroll, 2013)

Today, especially as a result of digitization, content producers and consumers are merging. Everybody produces, changes and contributes his or her part. Also, the creation of oneself happens through links and participation in the creative process. (cf. Sacco, 2013, p. 7) The quotation of culture, a postmodern characteristic, plays an important role here. Postmodernism is characterized by 'allusions and citation of things that have already existed in new contexts' (Gern, 2003). Baudrillard defines this time as an epoch of '*constant repetitions, quotes from the past in new contexts*'. He refers to every aspect, to art, politics, theory and society (Brown, 1995, p. 81). It is the time of 'consumption of symbolic meaning and construction of multiple realities' (Elliot, 1993), which provides a better idea of why culture becomes so important. It is the epitome of symbolic meaning.

Now that culture and its use is part of the economic value chain, it is no longer just a voluntary occupation, but also a necessary part of everyday life. This makes it more complicated to create something 'special' and thus be recognized. (cf. Sacco, 2013, p. 7) So here again an acceleration takes place, and also a net-like punctual structure of creation, in which everyone participates.

2.2.5. Network society and curating Self

When communication theory dealt with the 'communicative charging of products with sense', it usually took the field of advertising as the object of investigation. (cf. Karmasin, 1997, p. 94) However, 'brands' and brand communication often no longer ends at the borders of the classic 'advertising' genre. Developments, such as the change from consumer to prosumer - fueled by the social media - have made it clear that contact and involvement with brands and products have long left the narrow boundaries of classic advertising ('the poster' or 'the TV spot').

As already mentioned, 'being special' is more than just one option in postmodernism. Instead, it is an expectation that gains more weighting and is placed on oneself as well as on others. All activities are chosen according to how special they can be presented and how suitable they are to support the unique 'self'. (cf. Cezanne, 2013, p. 56) It is, therefore, a matter of delivering an authentic performance. The own life and that of all points of the network gets curated. Thus these points in the network become the audience and everyone is judged by these points. (Reckwitz, 2017, sec. 309) This is due to the evaluation and need to make the value exist through their attention and the ascription of value. It is therefore not surprising that the self is increasingly regarded as capital, and that the evaluation of the self is increasingly moving into focus.

Social media and profiles are the stage on which the performance and the review take place. (cf. Reckwitz, 2017, sec. 168 f.) The assumption suggests that postmodern subjects have a structure comparable to that of the digital network in which they reside. Although this structure opens up an almost unlimited range of possibilities, it also carries the risk of overstraining. The overload of information and the choice of channels, for example, makes it difficult to be recognized, on the one hand, and to find suitable information, on the other. This makes attention a precious asset for all participants of the network, be it people, parties, or companies.

The vast amount of information and possibilities serve and support the individualization, as well as the uniqueness of the members. Each member can choose the elements and channels that suit him or her best. This is a decisive factor of the contribution to fragmentation and enables a high degree of differentiation. (cf. Lenze, 2002, p. 184) However, the non-linear structure of communication and the choice of media makes it difficult to reach the consumer with a message. (Jäckel, 2011, p. 304) The amount of information and the

unchanging capacity of people's attention volume makes the 'attention economy' a key aspect of postmodernism.

[...]”approaching customers on the basis of permission, you have to earn the attention of customers instead of buying them.”

(Wiedemann, 2006, p. 11).

The consumer thus gains power through the reciprocal infrastructure. They not only receive messages, but they also participate in shaping them and serve as a channel. The consumer becomes a strong medium. (cf. Heun, 2012, sec. 402 f.) Due to the intangible structure of the network, the symbolic value and the emotional charge of brands becomes more relevant. (cf. Lenze, 2002, p. 192) This can also be applied to the complexity and degree of affectation. One's own identity is no longer expressed by goods themselves, but by their symbolic value. The Internet serves here as infrastructure for charging with 'sense'. (cf. Lenze, 2002, p. 185) The aim is to be acknowledged as singular, through the selected fragments, in order to reach the audience and to be evaluated by them.

2.2.6 Findings: Chapter 2.2 Postmodern Life Reality and Sense in culture capitalism

- 1) Postmodernism is to be understood as a fundamental change in the value orientation of our society (away from rationality and functionality) towards creativity, self-actualization and self-curation.
- 2) The role of arts and culture has changed. Whilst they have played an interacting 'counterpart', criticizing the industrialized/ ideological society, in today's cultural capitalism they contribute to the capitalist production of 'cultural value and meaning'.

- 3) The differentiation through verifiable product qualities is not only obsolete due to market saturation, but also because rationality and truth are no longer considered to be the source of sense for modernity.
- 4) People focus on entertainment and performance and want to be touched emotionally, as a consequence of turning away from rationalism.
- 5) Status values such as 'individuality' and 'cultural capital' are today more important than the status values of industrial capitalism (such as 'money' or 'monetary capital').
- 6) There has been a general change in the structure of politics, economy, and society. The linear and origin-related structure becomes a punctual and net-like structure characterized by reciprocity and presence.
- 7) Digitalization is increasing the fragmentation of the media landscape, and stereotypical advertising messages of industrial capitalism are changing into more individual and interacting communication.
- 8) In cultural capitalism, the production of 'sense' takes place in closed systems less (e.g., church, state). It is more and more about quotations, fragments, set pieces and symbols that are charged with value in order to provide individually selectable components for the individual self-curation of people.
- 9) Creativity and the 'self' became capital in cultural capitalism.
Brands and Goods take a vital role as 'tools' to help people define their 'Self' and their status.

All these characteristics of cultural capitalism, as well as the network society, do not sound like 'everyday tools' for brand professionals. However, when searching for 'tools' of postmodern brand management, a closer look at Andreas Reckwitz's concept of 'singularization' may be of assistance.

2.3. Singularity

2.3.1 Social logic of the general/ Structure of industrial capitalism

In the last chapter it became apparent that the standardization of modernity or industrial capitalism started to grasp the world more quickly. Objects, subjects, and processes became rationalized and interchangeable. All components were functional or were viewed as functional. (cf. Reckwitz, 2017, sec. 641)

This interchangeability was not only found in the working environment. The people's idea of what life was worth living and what values were worth striving for was also much more uniform than it is in postmodernism.(cf. Heun, 2012, sec. 397 f.) For instance in Germany many people lived in the suburbs, would build a house, have a car, a family, and once a year travel to the North Sea or Mallorca. There was a predominant collective idea of life. 'Linear and hierarchical structures' and rigid identities (cf. Han, 2005, p. 15), which left little space and thus made the world manageable and people predictable and calculable.

The particular indeed existed, yet it was the general that was prevailing. Only this basic structure made it possible for 'standardized' mass media to reach the homogeneous masses with standardized product promises in order to secure 'resonance' and thus an economically relevant 'mass sale' for B2C corporations for these products. (cf. Królewski & Sala, 2014, p. 13)

This proportion was reversed in postmodern times.

2.3.2 The social logic of the particular/ Structure of postmodernity

The singular and the theory of the singular is not only found in Reckwitz's writings but also in the theory of French postmodernism (e.g., Baudrillard 1988, 1989).

However, Reckwitz's description of the 'consciously produced peculiarities', becomes particularly useful when one considers that Baudrillard's 1980's abstract prognoses can today be found in everyday life of ever broader strata. (cf. chapter 1.2 Problem Statement 'Sinus Milieus') Reckwitz outlines the social logic of the 'special' as a new social structure that replaces the social logic of the general as the structure of the modern. (cf. Reckwitz, 2017b, sec. 121) His constant references to the real everyday life (in contrast to Baudrillard) and to a development that has taken place, probably justifies the success of Reckwitz, even if his theory is not necessarily an innovative one. Although it would not have been beneficial to confront Brand Professionals with Baudrillard's forecasts in 1988, Reckwitz's findings can be broken down into a kind of 'checklist' of the value change of cultural capitalism, which can certainly be found in a similar form in the practice of brand management.

2.3.3 Findings: Chapter 2.3 'Singularity'

- 1) From industrial capitalism to postmodernism, there has been a shift from conscious standardization and rationalization to the conscious production of peculiarities.
- 2) Accordingly, the goal of contemporary brand management should be the **translation of 'singularity' into brand models.**

2.4. Tools of singularization

According to Reckwitz, values of cultural capitalism originate from what is particular - the Singularity. Cultural capitalism thus charges goods with values,

i.e., valorizes them by which the singular develops. According to Reckwitz, the 'singular' is thus consciously produced. (cf. Reckwitz sec. 2470) It is no longer a matter of making individual objects/subjects interchangeable with one another; instead, it has become a matter of being so different that comparison, and thus, an exchange is no longer possible. Singularization creates (cultural) value. (cf. Reckwitz sec. 1120)

Following the example of Reckwitz, the 'Tools of Singularization' will be defined for the purposes of this work going forward - which can also be found later in brand management (as if these tools are suitable for creating social value, consequently they would also have to be able to create it for brands). Conversely, this would mean that it has become increasingly difficult for brands to create brand value without using these tools (see Chapter 2.4):

2.4.1 Affecting by values

From chapter 2.1 (cf. 2.1.5 Findings: Chapter 2.1 "Brands") it became clear that today, brands are a substitute for religion and ideology as a source for sense. The term "value" has to be understood twice. It replaces the values of 20th century institutions (religion, science, state) as 'representative of moral/ethical values' (climate change, freedom, peace, etc.). These values, however, are no longer the 'fundamental immovable values' of that time, but rather fragmentary aspects of individual 'lifestyles' (sustainable/ vegan/ low-carb/ paleo/ etc.) (cf. 2.2.6 Findings: Chapter 2.2).

On the other hand, they mean values of a 'modus vivendi' of the network society. To live one's own life 'creatively' and interconnected is no longer only 'a balance' to the rational professional everyday life' (as in the 20th century) but it became the necessary 'status attribute' of 'socially successful people' (in other words: if

one needed a Mercedes in front of a single-family house in the past in order to be considered 'successful', today one should at least practice a 'creative second occupation'. (cf. Oesterdiekhoff, 2001, p. 57)

These values are essential tools to produce a reaction (they trigger *'feelings like joy, tension, enrichment of the self, the feeling to do something meaningful'*, (cf. Reckwitz, 2017, sec. 2066)

The result of this for the objects of cultural capitalism are that an old watch is not singular because of its product characteristics or its function, which would be interchangeable features and therefore would make the clock itself replaceable. It must be charged with (narrative) values; for example, it could have a valuable 'manufactory craftsmanship' (which opposes interchangeable mass production). It is about the context that has built itself around it, e.g., its extraordinary manufacturing history and the significance it attains for people. (cf. Reckwitz sec. 1180)

Nowadays, it is all about emotion, fascination, and the resulting entertainment value. 'It is enjoyment, not consumption'. (cf. Reckwitz, 2017, sec. 2146) So the atmosphere becomes focussed before product benefit. (cf. Reckwitz, 2017, sec. 2117) The reactions triggered, for example, by narratives are the content of the structure of singularities.

These affections help people to significantly identify themselves, and integrates for example a brand into their own cosmos and structure, because of the identification through affection. Thus, they become part of the complex 'self' of postmodern people and can help them to be evaluated as singular and accordingly to be rewarded socially. (cf. Reckwitz sec.1852)

Values, therefore, became one of the most essential tools to affect objects, lifestyles, or products. (Reckwitz, 2017a, sec. 2099)

2.4.2 'Intrinsic Complexity' as Structure of Singularity

Already from the structure of the 'values' of cultural capitalism, it became clear that singularities are more complex than the 'sense giving' structures of industrial capitalism. However, the complexity is also a quality criterion. The complexity makes it more difficult to compare or exchange something or someone. (cf. Reckwitz sec. 902) Intrinsic complexity promises the opposite of simplification through standardization. (cf. Reckwitz Position 2450)

In contrast to the linear structure of modernity (linear and gradual reduction of complexity), the appropriation of self-complexity in cultural capitalism takes place in the network and is therefore punctual. (cf. Han, 2005, p. 13 f.) It cannot be explained as a simple reversal of the direction of modernity. In other words, the development of rationalization is not merely reversed and processes are now going to be 'irrationally complicated' again. Instead, complexity of its own results from the curation of various cultural pieces in the network. Self-complexity consists of fragments that people, companies and selected objects use to form and express their own 'identity' (cf. Chapter 2.2.5 Network society and curating self).

The more points of connection a certain self-complexity offers, the more people can be reached through the network, because all network points interact with each other. Acceleration takes place through constant reciprocity (see chapter 2.2.5. Network society and curating self).

The intrinsic complexity and the network structure are dependent on each other. *'Complex identities are restless by themselves and disappear if they can not make contact'*. (Baecker, 2018, p. 61)

The intrinsic complexity of the network society from the "countercultures" (punk, etc.) of late modernity distinguishes insofar as they draw their value not from demarcation, but from the individual combination of identity and sense fragments. (cf. Reckwitz sec. 902)

Due to the net-like structure, the subject is flexible. Connections can dissolve as quickly as they can create new ones, depending on the benefit for their identity. (cf. Han, p. 25 ff.)

This fast-moving nature is also reflected in new forms of community that are increasingly replacing the family construct. The classic family structure someone gets born into is becoming more obsolete and will be increasingly replaced by a mix of self-chosen friends and relatives. (cf. Reckwitz sec. 4727)

Michel Maffesoli (1988) goes further and describes a 'renewed sense of solidarity' that is extremely fugacious. 'Emotional communities' or 'postmodern tribes' create an intense (albeit short-term) feeling of 'empathy and camaraderie'. (cf. Heun, 2012, sec. 641 f.)

Thus 'intrinsic complexity' does not only mean the 'complexity of the structure', but also the 'complexity of the stances and of a mindset'. (cf. Heun, 2012, secs. 4599 ff.) Translated to brands, it can, therefore, be assumed that they should offer numerous sense and stances in order to 'acquire complexity' themselves. In addition to a complex network (which they 'make available' to consumers), they probably also need increasingly complex mindset and opinions that create 'sense offers' to the customer.

2.4.3 Culture and Hyperculture as 'Pool' for Singularities

Hyperculture becomes the source of peculiarities, i.e., of singularities. The dissolution of cultural boundaries caused by globalization and digitalization offers an inexhaustible pool of cultural fragments. However, culture is only 'singular'

when it is completely separated from its context in the sense of hyperculture and put together in new combinations to form something unique. (Reckwitz sec.2454, 2460) The existing net-like structure consists of nodes and fragments that do not run linearly but can be connected freely and in infinite combinations. Thus hyperculture is almost unrestricted through combinations and mixtures, consequently a constant creation of new can be achieved. (cf. Han, 2005, p. 15 f.) This network and the reciprocity in which everyone can participate offers unlimited possibilities for defining the self.

Out of this network, everyone extracts what one can and wants to identify with and uses it to build up a singular net-like self that becomes virtually limitless. (cf. Han p.19 ff.) There is no beginning nor end, all components, all units of this network are mutually dependent and exchange and change reciprocally through their relationship to each other. Hyperculture is characterized by rapid change through a dissolution of boundaries. Digitization is both an infrastructure and an accelerator. This results in consumers who not only feel that they belong exclusively to one culture, but who seek out their identity from all the fragments that are suitable for them. (cf. Han p.32 ff.)

Culture in the narrower sense, i.e., art and communication forms such as pop, visual arts, fashion, etc. unites 'formats' consisting of some of the most essential characteristics, which are increasingly considered to have more value.

Culture serves as a "source" for its intrinsic complexity and affects, and therefore it makes sense to reference it for brand management - even if it is only in the form of sponsoring or testimonials that enable an image transfer from "culture" to "brand". Chapters 2.2.2 to 2.2.6 (cf. 2.2.6 Findings: Chapter 2.2 "Postmodern Reality of Life and Postmodern Meaning") made it clear that culture, by its very nature, contains many qualities that are regarded as "valuable" today (values such as creativity, self-updating, self-realization, etc.). It is thus perfectly qualified

as a "pool" to create or recharge singularities.

2.4.4 Findings: Chapter 2.4 'Tool of Singularization'

- 1) Singularities affect mainly through values. They are charged with fragmented "lifestyle values" and replace partly 20th century institutions (religion, ideology, science, or church, state, science) as "source" and "guardian" of values that give sense to one's own life. Values give them the basis for identification.
- 2) The intrinsic complexity of their numerous fragments of attitudes, values, stories, narratives, symbols, aesthetics and points of connection in the net make singularities less 'interchangeable' and therefore become 'valuable'.
- 3) Culture has become the primary source and structure to charge brands with value (since it 'intrinsically' contains many aspects of complexity, and numerous values of cultural capitalism - such as 'creativity' already).

2.5 Conclusion of findings: The meaning of singularization für Brands

On the basis of the literature, the question now arises to what extent brand charisma can be produced by singularization. How can brands remain relevant considering the described development and to what extent do they use the cultural capitalistic tools of a 'society of singularities'?

In order to create value for target groups, brands always copied and used more general cultural techniques and strategies. Back when the functional value was a guiding value and overproduction was seen as morally doubtful, 'Brands' were just a marker for a certain quality (cf. Chapter 2.1.4 2.1.4 Take Away Points:

Chapter 2.1 "Brands"). As rationality was the guiding force of society, brands also had to focus on the values of industrial rationality (cf. *ibid.*). When societies later searched for replacements for ideologies, brands had to 'mirror' values like art, culture and affects).

Given the historical and cultural history of brands it therefore seems likely that brands will have to again utilise the general contemporary tools that create social value and confer status today. Accordingly, these tools would today be the 'tools of singularization' as described in chapter 2.4, "Tools of Singularization" (cf. chapter 3.1).

3. Methodology

In chapter 2.5, the central tools of singularization were defined: **Values, intrinsic complexity, and culture**. The empirical part of this work now intends to examine to what extent these tools are already used in practice, consciously or unconsciously, and how practitioners of brand management assess the tools of singularization and their practical usefulness in creating resonance. In order to operationalize this tool for branding purposes, the following systematization can be defined:

3.1 Operationalization of the Tools of Singularization

3.1.1 Brands and (ethical) values

Values serve to affect goods and thus also brands and products in cultural capitalism, and they create orientation and emotional connection. Typical values of cultural capitalism are creativity, self-actualization, or self-realization (cf. 2.4.1 Affecting through values, ff.).

The aim is to form 'interest groups' and make connections that are relevant to the development of the 'self'.

Hypothesis 1: *Brands position themselves alongside more fragmented value systems of cultural capitalism in order to reach the equally fragmented target groups.*

3.1.2 Brands and intrinsic complexity:

Intrinsic complexity describes an individual or special identity composed of fragments. It is a punctual and net-like linkage of identity and sense components, of narratives, values, and interests; a network. Elements of the postmodern receive their value through 'incomparability'. This incomparability is achieved through a specific complexity. These values, narratives, etc. are carried, disseminated and reinforced by those in the network, who can benefit from the brand in order to nourish the 'self'. The complexity of one's own identity is thus characterized by mutual relations to all elements, strengthening or dissolving each other.

Brands today have to strive for the aforementioned net-like complexity - and be composed of more ever increasing individual aesthetic and content components.

Hypothesis 2: *The complexity of brands is increasing in order to reach fragmented target groups in fragmented media channels. For the purpose of creating resonance with target groups, it is necessary that brands no longer offer 'closed ideologies' and status value, but a multitude of 'identity fragments' for consumers.*

3.1.3 Brands and Culture

Culture contains all the crucial elements of singularity. It is charged with meaning, affects, contains stories, holds value, and is hence perfectly qualified as an individual identity provider that gets socially rewarded. Culture thereby becomes the most important carrier of 'values' of cultural capitalism and is consequently the most relevant source for brand content.

Hypothesis 3: *The shift towards culture capitalism and the importance of creativity, makes culture one of the main sources for brands to reach fragmented target groups.*

3.2 Research method and Justification

3.2.1 Qualitative research method

For this thesis, the qualitative method of data collection and evaluation was used. The non-standardized expert interview was chosen from the field of qualitative

social research as a suitable survey method. In this method, the answers to the questions of the interview are not defined or categorized beforehand, as it would be the case in a standardized interview. It is intended to provide a broad spectrum of information. As will be explained later, the experts selected for this interview have different expertise and work in agencies with different focal points. This should enable the data to include a comprehensive overview of all areas that influence the appearance of brands. (cf. Atteslander, 2006, p. 134 f.)

3.2.1.1 Interview structure

The questions of the interview are semi-structured. It is possible to ask the questions to the interviewees in any order appropriate to the course of the interview. However, it is only used during the interviews if it contributes to the quality of the interview. This happened in Interview 1. The expert already mentioned during his answers aspects that would have been addressed elsewhere in the interview. To avoid interrupting the flow of the conversation, some suitable questions were therefore anticipated here. (cf. Atteslander, 2006, p. 125) However, both the introductory questions and the final questions are fixed in their position. This is to be justified with their actual function. Although the first and the closing questions would also provide usable data elsewhere in the interview, they would lose their intrinsic functionality, since they rather serve as a general introduction to the subsequent questions and future prospects. The non-standardized and semi-structured qualitative method of data collection chosen for this thesis allows it to ask questions in case of uncertainties during the interview and to go into details if it appears to be relevant for the research question. This allows a much more detailed indexing of information. (cf. Gläser, J.; Laudel, G; 2010 p. 41)

3.2.1.1 Interview Guideline

Despite the open structure of the interview and the answers to the questions, it is necessary to establish an interview guideline in order to ensure that all topics relevant to the thesis are covered.

First, subcategories are created, from which then the corresponding guideline for the expert interview will be derived. (cf. Gläser, J.; Laudel, G; 2010 p. 41) The components of this category system are listed below and are based on the hypotheses which have been derived from the research question. (cf. Gläser, J.; Laudel, G; 2010 p. 41 f.)

3.2 The expert interview

Gläser and Laudel describe experts as somebody with specific knowledge in a particular field. They are about to be seen as 'witnesses' of what the researcher wishes to learn. Thus the expert is able to contribute specific knowledge. (cf. Gläser, J.; Laudel, G; 2010 p. 12 f.)

3.2.1 Research Sample

The result of the interview is supported by the statements of the interviewee in addition to the own findings. It is intended to provide information on the extent to which the structural change in society identified in the literature section influences the everyday practice of communications/marketing/digital agencies. Since agencies serve a large number of different companies and their brands, they have a comprehensive overview of the influence of social changes on brands.

3.2.1.1 Expertise and Section Justification

Of course, this work could be limited to a certain area of brand management or related to a specific industry. However, since this work aims to describe the social change in the current practice of brands and their structural and substantive change, this subdivision will be foregone. Some later research could elaborate on this, and go further into detail. In line with this approach, experts were selected who serve a large number of different customers from various industries. Observations made by these experts can represent change more comprehensively than those who only look after one brand. If only one brand is supervised over a long period of time, there is a high risk that the data collected will reflect a very one-sided truth which is only related to the supervised company. In order to be able to close the gap between the literature part and the everyday practice of brand management, experts with many different brands to supervise are required.

The interviewees are aged between forty and fifty, have decades of experience in strategic areas, and are in leading positions in agencies. The age of the experts makes it possible to obtain a description of the changes that have taken place in recent decades, both in terms of products and their brands, as well as the underlying social change.

3.2.1.2 Agencies

In order to serve the aim of this thesis, all professional professions and agencies that influence the appearance of brands can be considered. These include advertising agencies that deal with brand communication in the form of campaigns and are likely to have an overview of communication trends, digital

agencies, etc. The agencies for which the selected interview partners are working for, serve both institutional and private companies.

Interviewee	Profession and Background	Agency size, main focus, customers
E1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Director of Scholz & Friends Agenda since 2002 • Strategy and concept development • Main focus: socio-political communication • Studied political science 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subsidiary company of one of the biggest Digital creative Agencies in Germany Scholz & Friends • Focuses on Public Relations and Agenda Setting with an interface between politics, economy and society • Customers: from private as well as public/ institutional sector, B2B
E2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy and consulting of the digital agency interactive tools • Creative director at 'Zum goldenen Hirschen' in Germany and Executive director of the Berlin location, where E2 was responsible for customers of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Digital agency with location in Berlin and Munich and 20 years of experience • Development and execution of communication strategies and crossmedial campaigns

	<p>international brands and corporations, federal ministries, associations and institutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching at several Universities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers B2B • Supports companies in the digital transformation and the development of digital communication strategies
E3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Founder and executive director of the Berlin agency 'Super an der Spree' • Main focus: Strategic planning and consultation for companies and brands • 6 years as CCO and Planning director in one of 'Zum Goldenen Hirschen' • 2 years as strategic planning director 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative, digital and campaigning agency • Makes connection between 'brands, people and opinions' • Customers: public and institutional sector, B2B, private sector

Table 1: Experts and agencies

3.2.2 Selection of Experts

The experts were approached via email or telephone. They were selected on the basis of recommendations and personal contacts of third parties and on the criteria of the representative sample selection, to ensure that their knowledge is suitable for the aims of the thesis. A total of 10 possible Interviewee were approached with four positive answers as a result. In the end three experts agreed to share their knowledge in the set timeframe. The differentiation of the

experts occurs through their qualifications and their knowledge about brands from different angles. Through the different backgrounds, as well as the agencies in which the experts work, the collection of valuable and comprehensive information is possible.

This group of experts, with their different backgrounds and specific knowledge in their fields functions as a representative sample for this thesis.

3.3 The interview framework

As mentioned before the semi-standardized expert interview was selected from the field of qualitative social research. For these purposes, a framework for the interview has been established to ensure that appropriate information can be collected for relevant aspects. The questions asked, are assigned to specific topics, that have been predefined. (cf. Gläser, J.; Laudel, G; 2010 p. 144) The language of the interview questions should be adjusted to that of the interviewees. Accordingly, technical terms that the interviewee might not be able to understand are not used. The actual interviews were pre-assessed. This was intended to ensure that the contents of the questions were interpreted in accordance with the hypotheses. (cf. Atteslander, 2006, p. 278 f.) Although all experts come from different backgrounds, they all have sufficient experience in the topics relevant to the survey, so that it was not necessary to adapt the questions individually. Therefore, as mentioned above, the conditions were comparable for all respondents.

In order to make the shift in society, which was presented in the literature section, usable for the research question, the aspects relevant for brands will be implemented, and the language adapted within the interview questions. This should make it possible to identify to what extent the "Tools of Singularization"

are already applied in everyday practice. Further explanations can be found in 'Table 2'.

The interview responses are used to support the knowledge gained from the literature research and hence lead to a holistic consideration of the topic. To ensure a rich data collection, the interview contains fifteen questions in total. As Gläser and Laudel suggested, a total up to fifteen questions can be asked in one hour. (cf. Gläser, J.; Laudel, G; 2010 p. 144) Due to non-standardized interview method, and therefore the open questions, the length of each interview varied from expert to expert. The average of the duration was 60 minutes as intended. The high number of questions asked during the set 60 minutes, made sure, that all for the thesis necessary data could be collected. The explanation for each question in table 2 is to be considered as justification for the interview questions asked. Although the questions can be asked in any order, excluded the one's defined as 'introductory questions' and the 'final questions', the guideline assigns these questions to the topics to which they contribute. This allows for a more precise approach in the later evaluation. (cf. Gläser, J.; Laudel, G; 2010 p. 146)

The guideline is divided into themes. It starts with very broad questions which the respondent can answer spontaneously. The first question should clarify which social and brand-related changes seem most significant to the experts and which factors have a positive influence on the success of brands. The following questions go more into detail, addressing the structural changes of brands, changes in value creation and therefore the shift of content brands need to provide. The usage and relevance of culture is the fourth topic. The interview closes with questions about future and trends.

Category	Question	Intention/Aim
Introductory question/ review and success factors	Q1: How has the role of brands (for the consumer) changed in the last ten to thirty years until today and which changes in society occurred that can be seen in relation to the changed role of brands?	This first question intent to bring the respondents in the right mood for the interview. It seeks to find out how precise their knowledge about social changes are and how they relate those changes to brands. This question is intentionally formulated broad, to find out what the most crucial changes were during the last decades. The respondents should, therefore, answer what comes first to their minds. Further, they are more likely to integrate the changes of the last decades concerning brands during the answers of the following questions.
	Q2: What makes brands successful today and which components can be identified to promise success?	The second question aims to go into detail about brands and general success factors. By later comparison of the respondents' answers, possible trends can be identified, and whether the individual participants consider the same factors to be crucial for the success of a brand or not. Therefore, this question is formulated very generally.
Fragmentation and complexity- Structure of	Q3: What impact do the increasingly fragmented	Trying to find out to what extent brands have

brands	target groups have on the complexity of brands?	adapted to the fragmented world and consumers, and whether brands are 'copying' this structure to penetrate to target audiences.
	Q5: Do you have the impression that the complexity reaches a level that resembles that of subjects? If so, what does this mean for brands?	This question picks up question 3 again and asks for associations the respondent has with the complexity of subjects (such as political attitudes, network behavior, storytelling, etc.)
	Q4: Can you identify a shift in what brand activity focuses on today, compared to the past?	This question focuses on the possible additional expenditure for brand communication and active participation in the network by e.g. influencers, as well as the interaction with consumers (prosumers) and would thus prove a shifted focus towards complexity. This would also include the spending of money on fragmented media channels.
Value creation and sense- Content of brands	Q6: People tend to communicate their identity group membership through brands. What chances and risks do you see in this for brands and brand management?	This question generally deals with the opportunities and risks for brands by placing them on the market with values that go beyond the pure product benefit. And to what extent these values have changed in the last 10 years. It is meant to serve as an introduction to this new category, and points the interviewee in the direction of the purpose of identity creation for consumers.

	<p>Q7: What are the consequences of the increasingly fragmented target groups for brands/brand management, especially when it comes to values?</p>	<p>Attempts to find out if the experts perceive the values as more fragmentary, and how brands respond to it, and what difficulties may arise for brands.</p>
	<p>Q8: The postmodern people have dedicated their lives towards self-realization and their life-style with all interests, values, wishes are becoming more and more individual. What are possible ways for brands to act upon this change, and what are consequences for brands concerning addressing these target groups?</p>	<p>Trying to allude to brands as a source of sense for the people of the present and trying to figure out how brands take advantage of it.</p>
	<p>Q9: People are becoming more and more "advertising avoiders." What role does the positioning of a brand concerning values and communication to the outside world play in this context?</p>	<p>Alludes to affecting consumers through matching values, and how brands can create resonance by using values.</p>
Culture and brands	<p>Q10: In the relationship brand to culture, what has changed in the last ten years?</p>	<p>Trying to figure out how the relationship between brand and culture has changed and whether it has become more significant, in order to create value for the consumer.</p>
	<p>Q11: How useful is it for brand management to refer to contemporary culture/ Zeitgeist, especially with regard to fragmented</p>	<p>Refers to the supposedly affective value of culture, and the role of culture in brand management in regard to fragmented</p>

	<p>target groups? Please consider also simple entertaining cultural quotes. Do you think that these references attract attention? How and why?</p>	<p>target groups. Do cultural references simplify the access to consumers, can it thus create resonance where other paths are no longer sufficient? And also, makes culture a broader reach possible?</p>
	<p>Q:12 What role cultural references in campaigns when it comes to differentiation through value/meaning/ significance?</p>	<p>Is culture seen as a source of 'sense' and meaning for consumers/ is there an awareness of the significance of culture and creativity today and how this can be used for brands?</p>
Differentiation	<p>Q13: In your opinion, what are the most relevant differentiation strategies, and do you experienced that they lack crucial aspects? If so, can you name them and describe why?</p>	<p>Seeks to find out where the brand management strategies needs to be adjusted in regard to the change in society.</p>
Future	<p>Q14: Brands are forced to be more and more creative and more and more complex. What do you think, will the peak be reached sometime, and thus differentiation by other means as loading Brands with meaning have to be developed? What could be next?</p>	<p>When asked about future prospects and trends, especially what the experts believe, is a sustainable strategy for brands to reach their target groups.</p>
	<p>Q15: How will the role of brands (for the consumer) develop in the future?</p>	<p>Seeks to find out of the experts think the role is going to change in the future, or if it will remain more or less the same.</p>

Table 2: Interview guideline and aim of questions

3.4 Transcription

In order to ensure that no information from the interview was lost or omitted, the interviews were recorded with a dictation recorder. The permission of the experts to record the interviews was obtained in advance. This type of recording also has the advantage that the questioner can concentrate fully on the conversation with the expert, as no notes need to be taken during the conversation. (cf. Gläser, J.; Laudel, G; 2010 p. 193) In the later transcription, non-verbal expressions such as laughter, etc. are omitted since they have no relevance to the thesis and would distract from the content of the answers. Also, the answers were slightly modified to adapt the spoken language to the written language. Attention was paid not to distort the meaning of the statements. Parts that have no relation to the actual topic were not included in the transcript(for example, small talk). (cf. Gläser, J.; Laudel, G; 2010 p. 194)

In order to be able to quote the interviews appropriately in the evaluation section, the lines are numbered.

3.5 Execution of the interview

The interviews were conducted in the period from 24.7.2018 to 16.8.2018. The interviews were conducted in German, as some interviewees indicated that they could communicate better using their mother tongue. The language barrier would therefore have had a qualitative impact on the respondents' replies. To ensure that all interviews were conducted under the same conditions, all interviews were carried out in German. All the interviews took place at personal meetings, mostly in meeting rooms of the respective agencies and were held by the author of this

thesis. To ensure that no data gets lost, the recording was captured with two devices. One was a dictation machine, the other an iPhone.

3.6 Evaluation method of the interviews

In order to adapt the content analysis to the data collection method, the qualitative content analysis was selected for evaluation. This serves to assign the collected data through the individual analysis steps to a system that makes the data verifiable and comparable. The individual steps of the analysis must be transparent and reproducible. (cf. Mayring, 2015, p. 50) The following quality criteria must be observed: '*Objectivity, reliability and validity*'. (Mayring, 2015, p. 53) An important point to be mentioned here, which distinguishes the qualitative from the quantitative method, is that the collected material in the analysis must be related to the original text. Therefore, the corresponding line numbers are listed in the later evaluation according to the text passages. (cf. Mayring, 2015, p. 50) In contrast to quantitative content analysis, however, this is not a generalization of the material. The complexity of qualitative content analysis should be reduced to the most relevant content, but not generalized. (cf. Mayring, 2015, p. 53) In order to structure the evaluation according to qualitative aspects, Mayring provides the following analysis steps, which also contribute to the above mentioned quality criteria:

1. Determination of the material
2. Analysis of the situation
3. Formal characteristics of the material
4. Direction of the analysis

5. Theoretical differentiation of the question
6. Determination of the analysis techniques and the process model
7. Definition of the analysis units
8. Analysis steps using the category system
9. Review of the category system for theories and material
10. Interpretation of the results in relation to the research question
11. Application of content-analytical quality criteria (Mayring, 2015, p. 62)

As the the points one to seven have already been dealt with in the chapter above, the next step is to define the category system. This category system has been derived from the five main topics defined earlier. This categories have the research question and the existing literature research as a basis. In the following, this category system has to be compared with the collected data and needs to be revised and re-examined. (cf. Mayring, 2015, p. 61) As interpretation method, the content summary has been picked as the most suitable of the different analyzing methods such as contingency analyzes. Mayring defines this as the reductive approach of processing of data. (cf. Mayring, 2015, p. 66) The data collected therefore gets reduced and allotted to the matching category. (cf. Mayring, 2015, p. 59) During the reduction, merging paragraphs are summarized and for the thesis irrelevant information gets deleted. (cf. Mayring, 2015, p. 61) The last steps are the finalization of the categories, which has been constantly reviewed during the process described. (cf. Mayring, 2015, p. 61) Next step is then the interpretation of the summarized and categorized data in view of the research question.

Due to the thematic structuring of the interviews, the categories could be derived on the basis of the specified topics. Since these topics have refrained from the

literary theoretical part of this thesis, it creates an accessible and easily understandable flow. The hypotheses, developed in advance, were subsequently assigned to each of these categories. The following analysis deals with the investigation of these hypotheses.

The final step is the setting up and the application of content-analytical quality criteria. The quality criterias mentioned before have to be proven in this step. *Objectivity* implies that the results of the analysis is free from the personal opinion of the author. Reliability describes the collected data validity and its preciseness. (cf. Mayring, 2015, p. 53)

Category	Subcategory	Question	Hypothesis
C1 Values	4.1.1 Change of values 4.2.2 Fragmentation of values 4.1.3 Identity through values 4.1.4 Values create resonance	Q1, Q2 Q6, Q7 Q8, Q9	Brands position themselves alongside the more fragmented value systems of cultural capitalism in order to reach the equally fragmented target groups.
C2 Complexity	4.2.1 Complexity of Brands and brand identity 4.2.2 Network 4.2.3 Narrations 4.2.4 Particulars in brands	Q1, Q2 Q3, Q4 Q5	H2: The complexity of brands is increasing in order to reach fragmented target groups in fragmented media channels. In order to create resonance with target groups, it is necessary that brands no longer offer 'closed ideologies' and status value, but a multitude of 'identity fragments' for consumers.
C3 Culture	3.1 Culture as	Q1, Q2	H3: The shift towards culture

	sense/meaning creator 4.2 Culture creates resonance	Q10 Q11 Q12	capitalism and the importance of creativity, makes culture as one of the main sources for brands to reach fragmented target groups.
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Table 3: Subject areas and sub categories with regards to interview questions and and coding.

4. Results

The qualitative data collection provides a large amount of raw data that will be evaluated on the following pages. Due to the nature of the method (semi-structured) 195 minutes of speech were recorded. The analysis will only include those which relate to corresponding hypotheses along the lines of the 'Tools of Singularization'.

4.1 Results regarding hypothesis 1

Brands position themselves alongside the more fragmented value systems of cultural capitalism in order to reach the equally fragmented target groups.

4.1.1 Change of values

"There are actually two major transformations, the digital one and the socio-ecological one. The socio-ecological one is even bigger than the digital one. Digital transformation is simply born out of a technical

possibility, whereas socio-ecological transformation is about the world we want to live in and the values that shape us.” (E1; 217-222)

E1 speaks in the further course of an increasing 'awareness' of companies, in regards to the question of 'great' values in direction of sustainability and purpose. As an example, he referred to 'Fridays for future' as well as to values, that customers see as part of their lifestyle and differentiation (E1; 241-245). It can be seen as a 'Golden Age' for brands that understand and embrace the values of today's society. This could open up entirely new markets (E1; 245-248). A more conscious consumption in general, that corresponds to these values E1 described, also E2 and E3 mentioned. E3 observed a development after 1989 in which the 'capitalist promise of happiness' lost its significance and immaterial values gained importance instead of material values (E3; 246-258) Thus the findings of the literature section have been supported. The products themselves have not changed significantly, but the values by which they could be placed on the market certainly did (E3; 231-234). The functional benefits of a product or service are no longer sufficient today (E3; 55-58).

E1 has observed a change from universal values that all people were equally oriented towards, such as religion, to a kind of disorientation, in which people now have to assemble their sense and identity (E1; 304-316). Especially the members of the 'creative class' would succeed in this, since they would not feel excluded from society like those who pursue purely functional occupations (like factory workers, jobs that resulted from industrial capitalism) (E1; 316-328). He is thus the only respondent to address the changes in society in terms of a shift in values towards culture and creativity and the 'self as capital'.

Except for E2, all experts found it mandatory to address the changed values of society in order not to become irrelevant for the consumer (E3; 137-142, E1;

304-316). E3 called the failure of brands to respond to change an 'economically threatening situation' for the company (E3; 137-142, E1; 248-249)).

If brand management responds to society or the 'Zeitgeist' through brand values, brands become more flexible and thus compatible for the consumer. This ability to adaptation distinguishes successful brands from less successful ones. (E3; 234-243)

4.1.2 Identity through values

The experts consciously use values to place brands in the minds of consumers. People want to express themselves through values (E2; 302-303), and products or brands offer them the opportunity to communicate and strengthen those values to the outside world (E2; 536-540). Consumers like to surround themselves with products from which they can derive their identity (E1; 106-109, E2; 66-68) and in which their individual lifestyles are reflected.

People want to be able to identify themselves and be affected (E1; 211-212, E3; 7104-105, E2; 480-483). Because of this, banal values or functional features are no longer sufficient today in order to place a product on the market (E1; 192-196, (E2; 326-328). This makes the meaning of values for brands evident.

4.1.3 Value creates resonance through identification and affection

That values can generate emotional attachment on the part of the consumer to the brand is generally accepted among experts, as has been shown in the previous sections (E2; 208-209, 536-540, E1; 103-106, 170-172).

Brands benefit from the emotional connection to the consumer, created through values and stances. Accordingly those values can be 'capitalized' for the

company (E3; 75-81, E1; 59-63). In the case of consumer goods, this makes an exaggeration or a link to a sense necessary (E3; 48-49). Brands try to generate added value which they communicate and thereby create sense in the consumer's life (E3; 59-64) There are opportunities for brands to establish themselves in the market by responding to values (E3; 109-110, E1; 28-30, 184-185, E2; 63-65). For those brands that largely dispense of current values, it could become much more difficult in the long run, to maintain their market position (E3; 241-245). This makes value communication in digital channels a compulsory instrument for attracting consumers' attention (E1; 287-289). According to E3, however, values and meaning must match the 'Zeitgeist' in order to create resonance (E3; 154-161). Also, values attract attention in fragmented target groups, according to E1 (E1; 165-167). According to E2, it is crucial for a brand to communicate the values the brand stands for to the consumer (E2; 274-276) Clear values also help the brand to do consistent marketing (E2; 291-295) However, these values should make a difference for the consumer in everyday life; banal and not 'serious' value offers would therefore fail to achieve the intended purpose (E2; 274-276). The values of a brand result in a variety of ways in which the brand can communicate these without losing the brand core. Acting around fixed values makes the brand flexible and yet consistent (E2; 447-463). According to E3, the narratives used to convey values must be coordinated with the context and environment that was defined as the target group (E3; 119-120).

4.1.4 Fragmentation of values

The experts have indicated that they are aware of the individualization of values (E3; 262-265, E2; 305-308, E1; 304-316). E1 justified the individualization of the values with the distinct decline of the homogeneity of the value orientation of

Western society. Both 'Christian religion, as well as 'great capitalist narratives', were 'no longer binding' (E1; 304-316), and thus everyone had to put together his or her own 'value system' (E1; 304-325). The individualization and its recognition had strongly increased, according to E3 (E3; 260-261). Thus, two of the experts support the observation that target groups are becoming more and more fragmented and that consumers want to present themselves more individually and in a more particular way. Accordingly, consumers assemble their own value system from suitable value components. In addition, awareness of these fragmented values leads to restructuring within companies, brands and communication with target groups, albeit very slowly. The tendency towards more values and stance, and the higher individuality of the values and lifestyles of the consumers, according to E1, companies are slowly discovering, that this is more than just a short-term trend, as was assumed five years ago (E1; 223-228).

E1 sees the adoption and advocacy of more individual values as an opportunity, especially for new and young brands (E1; 205-215). By conveying individual values, brands can also reach small target groups (E1; 165-167) or penetrate sub-segments (E2; 74) that would otherwise be difficult to reach.

Overlapping values, or values that support the personal identity, generate a resonance of the brand with the consumers (E2; 398-309).

Values and attitudes are essential for the distinction of brands for consumers so that they can also differentiate themselves through this brand (E1; 57-59).

4.1.5 Analysis

The experts thus support the findings of the literature section. In their opinion, there has been a great change in values in the last 20 years until today. To remain competitive, brands would have to respond specifically to these changes. "*Brands do not operate in a vacuum,*" (E3; 228-230), and have to adapt to

people's needs in order to remain attractive for consumers. As mentioned, although all experts have observed a change in values towards more sustainability, more stance towards e.g., political circumstances, and also the growing awareness of companies about the need to offer more and more value, but only E1 specifically addressed the change towards cultural capitalist values. It had not escaped his attention, that standardized activities and lifestyles today experience far less social reward, but that creative work and individual lifestyles have experienced an upswing in recent years. He identified the shift to creativity and culture as a source of sense and meaning, and a factor that promises social reward and status. It can be assumed that social theories are ahead of brand practitioners here. This first indication, however, will be examined further in chapter 4.3.

It is noticeable that companies are slowly shifting their perception of the individualization of values and lifestyles, resulting in a more individual offer of brand values. E2, however, was somewhat hesitant on the issue of individualization of people and their values and explained the fragmentation with digitization and thus rising number of channels. In the course of the interview, he admitted that the degree of individuality of people had remained the same, but that today it would be expressed more outwardly.

All the experts are aware that brands have to respond more individually to consumers and their values, although E2 explained this by other factors than E1 and E2. Through awareness of fragmentation, brands are increasingly penetrating smaller target groups. Consumers use brands and their values to strengthen their own values and show them to the outside world. Through them, target groups identify themselves and enter into a relationship with the brand, which plays a decisive role in the sale of the company's products and their existence on the market. All experts emphasized how important it is for brands to pick up values from society and reflect them in the brand, in order to create additional value for the consumer, and be able to penetrate fragmented target

groups. This confirms hypothesis 1, even if the experts have different opinions on the extent of fragmentation and individualization.

Only one expert identified the shift to creativity and culture as a source of meaning, and a factor that promises social reward and status.

Accordingly, it can be assumed that social theories are ahead of the brand practitioners here. This first indication, however, is presented in chapter 4.3 and will be examined further.

In general, however, it can be stated that the tool 'values' of brands are used to remain valuable for the consumer, and that the transition of the brand from marking and differentiating standardized goods through stereotypical identity offers to individual and fragmented value offers can be achieved. Successful brands succeed in responding to the change in values and thus continue to offer consumers a basis for identification.

4.2 Results regarding hypothesis 2:

The complexity of brands is increasing in order to reach fragmented target groups in fragmented media channels.

4.2.1 Complexity/ identity of brands

The experts consider brand management to be more elaborate and complex (E1; 49-56, E3; 123-124, 349, E2; 255-256) This is due to the fragmentation of channels and target groups. According to E3 (E3; 115-118), brands must now appear much more diverse than they used to two decades ago. In the planning,

more and more channels, and more fragmented customer journeys, more complex target groups, and corresponding habits have to be considered (E2; 249-252). The brand now takes place online as well as offline (E1; 49-56), resulting in touchpoints with the consumer (E1; 49-56, E3; 115-118).

According to E1, the logical consequence for brands due to the fragmented channels is therefore a strategic and homogeneous brand communication that includes all channels relevant to the brands (E1; 49-56). E1 added, however, that many companies still face difficulties in achieving the newly required complexity and the associated strategy development. As a reason for this, E1 cited rigid structures within companies that had been defined decades ago and had not yet been adapted to the new circumstances.

E2 is aware that target groups today can no longer be reached through linear communication and mass advertising messages (E2; 255-256, 188-191). He also listed a high level of complexity as a possible strategy for brands, whose values and attitudes resemble those of a consumer, and admitted that this would be implemented particularly by very 'lively brands', and that the target group could thus better identify with the brand (E2; 205-208).

However, for him, this was not a necessity in brand management, but just one of many options available to brands.

The experts largely agreed on the role of consumers in the brand network (E1; 87-89, E2; 94-95, E3; 349-351). E2 attributes them a significant role in the dissemination of brand messages (E2; 94-95). E1 had a much more comprehensive definition, describing the complexity of brands in addition to the attitudes and values that E2 also saw as part of brands, the conflicts, and controversies that they conducted, and emphasizing the relevance that brands need to be more involved in society to create relevance with target audiences (E1; 366-375).

E3 observed the attempts of brands to weave themselves into the everyday structure of people and to float in their cosmos (E3; 172-193).

4.2.2 More concrete: Network of a brand

It is, therefore, the identity of the brand that is important in order to differentiate from the competition in a relevant and long-term way for the consumer. It is no longer the direct differentiation from the competitor that is decisive, but the complexity of the brand. E1 is convinced that this should be viewed as a success factor for brands (E1; 128-132).

Only in response to detailed inquiries did E3 designate all people involved in one brand as the 'network' of the it (E3; 197). The proposal to compare the structure in the net with that of the consumer in the digital space, which creates a network there, he commented as a 'very interesting thesis' (E3; 206). He then made further connections to this from the author given narration and described the 'principles of action' of the brand as comparable to those of the consumer. There it would also be a matter of cultivating contacts of those who strengthen the network and can identify based on overlapping interests (E3; 197-206). E1 sees the network, like E2 and E3, as a tool for disseminating brand content and consumer knowledge about the brand. This is done in particular through content with which the participants in the network can identify (E1; 87-89).

E2 was aware of the individual elements that can constitute the network or the structure around the brand, but he did not seem to think of the network as a whole or as a coherent network and described these individual elements (E2; 287-289, 279-286) as 'one way' to implement brand management (E2; 205-210-217). For example, representatives of the marks for him belong to the brand personality and vice versa (E2; 212-217). Except for E1, none of the experts defined the complex construct of stakeholders around the brand as a network. The question that arises is whether this is because the idea of linear companies, employees, suppliers, customers, brand ambassadors is still too

profoundly anchored, and therefore do not regard the relationships as a network, or whether only the term 'network' used represents a problem. However, all experts were aware that, at least in the digital space, reciprocity between brands and their linkage points (whether consumers, advertising ambassadors, etc.) is of high value for the brand, as it increases the reach of the brand (E2; 129-127) and enables the brand to penetrate segmented target group areas that the brand would not be able to reach without this networking and reciprocity with the consumer (E3; 349-351, 143; E2; 68-73, 335-338, 129-127).

4.2.3 Complexity through narrations:

Stories and narratives are used by brands to communicate mindsets and values, so E1. (E1; 138-146). E1 sees storytelling as a relevant tool for brands to build a structure. This structure, or the elements contained in it, affect in the optimum case and thus ensure that consumers can identify with the brand. (E1; 171-172) The stories that are told about the brand must therefore be structured in such a manner, that they consist of at least a few elements that are relevant to the consumer and create a connection to the brand. By the congruence of the elements in the narration of the brand and those of the consumer, the latter carries the brand on to other consumers, because it supports the consumer in the expression of her or his own self. (E1; 83-87)

According to the experts, storytelling is a convenient means of reaching people today without being perceived as unpleasant by them. Narrations and storytelling are accordingly tools used by brands, i.e., by consumers to attract attention. (E1; 255-257, E2; 171) E1 also mentioned that the complexity of the brand increases through the addition of stories (E1; 93-95, E1; 97-102).

E2 describes the stories that are told about brands as a dynamic construct that can be used by brands to promptly respond to current events, trends, etc., and to

provide a basis for the evolution of the brand, and also to be able to respond to messages without losing the brand core (E2; 171- 172). E3 considers one-dimensional narrations, which lack any contemporary reference or describe only the product benefit, to be no longer sufficient to achieve resonance with the consumer, and thus agrees with the opinion of E2 (E3; 117-119).

Using celebrities and influencers to tell the stories of brands to reach the target groups, E2 identified as an essential tool for brands (E2; 173-175).

4.2.4 How to be 'special' for the consumer

As a tool to position brands as 'special' for the consumer, E2 named offers that brands could make to people who could support them in their everyday lives, i.e., make their lives more effective, healthier, more creative, etc. (E2; 194-199).

In addition, it is essential for brands to dedicate themselves to specific values, which they then can implement across all levels of the company and among all shareholders. If this succeeds, the brand would often be perceived as particularly valuable for the consumer (E2; 279-286).

E3 named the increasing individualization of products as a tool and a trend in brand management. He cited the possibility of being able to put together muesli according to one's own wishes, an offer by the the muesli manufacturer 'MyMuesli', as an example (E3; 345-347).

E1 described brands as a means for people to satisfy the desire for differentiation and the desire to present themselves as special/particular life; therefore the products offered would have to underline the individual lifestyle of the consumer in order to create resonance (E1; 31-34).

4.2.5 Analysis

This chapter reaffirms the hypothesis that brands have become more complex, and thus are reaching more fragmented target groups. Although all experts describe the extent of the structure of the brands, i.e., their network consisting of values, actions, all consumers (especially as prosumers) on and offline, in separate elements, they seem to perceive the components of this network, with the exception of E1, somewhat separately and subdivided into company responsibilities. For E2 in particular, the brand becoming more complex is only a tool for penetrating fragmented channels to reach the consumer (who has not become more individual for 20 years in his opinion). E3 describes brands as more complex than 20 years ago. E1, however, had the most concrete idea of the effect of the increasing complexity of brands. It describes a connection between the need to differentiate consumers, their network online, the more individual lifestyles, and the increasing complexity of brands. The fragmentation of channels was only one aspect of many for him.

The hypothesis is thus confirmed. Brand practitioners use a more complex brand construct than at the time of the standardization of industrial capitalism. The more complex structure of brands is thus the result of changes in society's structure and in response to increased consumer demands for the elements they use to express their singular selves. However, it remains questionable whether this complexity was merely a necessary response to digitization to reach people in the fragmented channels, or whether the complexity is being developed with the awareness to design brands as non-exchangeable.

4.3 Results regarding hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3: *The shift towards culture capitalism and the importance of*

creativity, makes culture as one of the main sources for brands to reach fragmented target groups.

4.3.1 Culture as sense and identity creator

Culture conveys values that people can identify with since they are strong carriers of values, memories, stories, emotions (E2; 345-355, 373-375). Culture can be used to transport values that are appropriate for the target group and thus approach it. (E2; 343-346, 354-358). Culture can, therefore, also be used to reach fragmented target groups (E2; 353-358, E1; 334-335, E3; 312), but E3 stated that using culture only reaches small target groups, while excluding most of the consumers which can not identify with this references used. E1, however, describes these references as a necessity for brands to gain consumer attention, while E2 and E3 perceive the integration of culture as less necessary.

E3 added that consumers only identify with cultural references if they know them and are able to read or interpret them (E3; 308-313).

4.3.2 Culture creates resonance

Expert 1 has recognized that incorporating the 'Zeitgeist' and cultural references can have a resounding effect on brands (E1; 271-275, 333-334) and has to be considered a success factor (E1; 337-339). He describes an 'added value of brands' through culture (E1; 356-365).

Creativity and culture are regaining increasing importance in working environment.

Culture can be a means against consumers 'avoiding advertising', because advertising messages are perceived less as advertising (E2; 423-424, 439-440,

E3; 329-331). Advertising with cultural references would be less 'irritating' to consumers (E3; 332-334).

E1's presence at the 2019 Cannes Lions Awards 2019 enabled him to report that the use of culture and 'Zeitgeist' in advertising communications has greatly increased and has been identified as the most successful campaigns. Integrating culture and into brand structure and communication holds opportunities even for low-interest products to appeal to consumers (E1; 265-271).

4.3.3 Analysis

While all experts acknowledged that the use of culture in communication helps significantly to circumvent consumers' reluctance to deal with advertising (E1; 295-297, 441-442), it did not seem relevant to two experts, despite their acknowledgement that 'culture attracts attention' (E2; 402-403, 467), and produces resonance independent of the industry (E3; 324-325, E3; 338-339). However, they did not weight this influence as significantly more important for brands than ten years ago (E2; 467, E3; 297). Nevertheless, the scope for action had been expanded by pop-cultural multiplication, and there would now be more to which brands could refer as a reference (E3; 297-300). All experts agreed that culture, when used correctly, attracts attention. However, the impression arises that culture and cultural references, as well as the shift of the 'sense creator' to creativity and thus the potential for brands to position themselves better, have not yet really been recognized as such.

Hypothesis 3 is thus only partially confirmed, and as already assumed in chapter, a gap in the use of the tools of singularities is identified.

5. Resume/Outlook

5.1 Summary of findings

At the beginning, this work stated that brands are struggling with dwindling consumer loyalty, resonance and consequently losses of brand value. The explanation attempts as well as solution approaches seemed to be so far only superficial trends, or symptom treatments. Often they do not provide a permanent solution to the problem and are therefore replaced by new assumptions and resulting recommendations for action.

With the aim to find possibly deeper explanations for the weakening brands, a research of the structural change of society and brands from industrial capitalism to postmodernism/cultural capitalism was carried out within the literature part of this thesis. Thus a parallel development between economy, society and brands could be identified. This allowed a first assumption about the social change that may not yet be fully reflected in brands. Meant is the development of society towards the conscious production of singularities, and the curating of the self with singular fragments, as well as the necessity of being singular in order to be noticed and socially rewarded.

The change from the standardization of content and structures to singularity seems to be the most comprehensive and relevant theory of society and was therefore examined in the practical part of the work on the basis of expert interviews. In order to verify the theory and identify potential areas that may be relevant for brand positioning, the elements that form singularities have been operationalized. This resulted in three subject areas: The brand's intrinsic

complexity, the brand's values, and the use of culture in brands. The practical part includes interviews with experts. The aim of this type of data collection was to find out which elements of singularization are already used by brands in brand practice and to identify potential areas for adapting brands to social change.

5.2 Resume

This thesis deals with the following research question:

How is the transformation of society from the industrial capitalism of the 20th century towards a postmodern 'cultural capitalism' of the 21st century, reflected in the contemporary practice of brands and which aspects have been disregarded so far by brand practitioners?

Only details that have not already been answered in depth in the literature section, will be addressed here.

Already in industrial capitalism brands served people as status symbols. However the content of what creates 'social status' shifted. Brands continue to play this role despite the shift towards more individual values. Values have to be adapted accordingly, and reflecting the needs of people. In terms of the postmodern development towards singularity, this means: Brands must offer the value components that consumers can use for their individual identity construct. Consumer have to perceive the brand as a suitable fragment for their identity and structure. This opens up many possibilities for brands, since the participants in the network of the affected consumer add the brand to their 'network structure', which could lead to a widespread of the brand within the constantly growing network. Brands that today intend not only to be arbitrary and quickly

interchangeable, must necessarily make a contribution to the singular identity of the consumer. Affirmation through values ensures a longer-term and more stable bond between the target groups. In addition, through the mutual benefit of the brand and the consumer, the brand is perceived less as a foreign element and as something to 'avoid'.

As the expert interviews have shown, most brand practitioners use this tool sufficiently to create resonance and adapt it to social change.

Another element of social theory is the intrinsic complexity, which represents a structural change of the postmodernism. It appears in consumers as well as in brands and in everything that can be evaluated as singular. Without this structure, the respective e.g. brands are interchangeable. Brands achieve this complexity through a network consisting of all elements that affect, i.e. narrations, values etc. as well as consumers and brand ambassadors. The intrinsic complexity thus consists of affective fragments that help both brands and consumers to be perceived as special. This perception leads consumers to add themselves to the structure of the brand. The more complex the structure, the more possible overlaps exist in e.g. values and network participants. This contributes enormously to the reach and distribution of the brand. It also makes them flexible and enables brand professionals to react dynamically to current events without losing the brands core. Brands thus get adapted to the complex structure of consumers and become 'similar' to them. This contributes significantly to the higher customer response. This increased complexity of brands has already taken place to a large extent, and brands have thus been adapted to the structural changes of postmodernism, even if the increasing density of the structure can be related in part primarily to the reaction to certain symptoms (such as more media channels), and not as an all-encompassing structural extension for the purpose of the 'non-exchangeability' of brands.

As emerged from the literature section, cultural capitalism is shifting to culture and creativity as sense creators, especially for the broad middle class. The creative self becomes the capital through which people can and want to take part in the market. Culture per se is singular, especially when it is removed from its contexts and combined into new ones. It is highly affective, symbols of values, stories and thus multi-layered, and becomes more complex the more people weave it into their structure. The elements become singular, especially through the net-like connections and reciprocity, and thus relevant to consumers. However, the consequence, or expectation, of the change in value resulting from cultural capitalism seemed little known to most experts. Although culture has always been used by brands to attract attention and penetrate fragmented target groups, it was more a means of addressing subcultures. (e.g. punks). The new relevance of culture and creativity for the constantly growing 'creative class' is only considered by one expert.

Accordingly, the clearest discrepancy between social theory and brand practice can be seen here. It can be assumed that cultural references can no longer only reach small subcultures and fragmented target groups. As more and more cultural fragments are used in hyper culture and get combined, each cultural fragment has a greater reach. In other words, since culture is now a middle class culture, brands are increasingly reaching larger parts of society, regardless of fragmentation, through culture. Perhaps this change in society, and the lack of expert knowledge to date, offers an explanatory approach to the dwindling relevance of brands.

Since it would go beyond the scope of this work, this theory was not discussed in more detail. However, it does open up new areas of research related to the societal shift towards creative class, creativity and culture as meaning and identity, and how brands can benefit from it.

By incorporating the elements that constitute singularities, brands or products of industrial capitalism can again create more relevance for the consumer. Thus, the adaptation of brands to the social change that has taken place from industry to postmodernism can be regarded as extremely valuable. Although it is not a guarantee for the success of a brand on the market, ignoring the change means relatively certain that the corresponding brand will become 'superfluous'. Eventually, taking into account the 'singular being' and serving the consumer as a singular identification fragment, a targeted spending of marketing budgets can lead to and concentrate on consciously creating singularities.

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