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# BRAND STORYTELLING: THE CASE OF COCA-COLA'S *JOURNEY* CORPORATE WEBSITE

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## ABSTRACT

*Brand storytelling is an evolving branding technique which involves continuous narratives about the brand through publishing and sharing useful brand-related content with consumers. Publishing content no longer includes publishing in traditional print media only, but also via electronic and social media in various media formats and on different platforms. In doing so, marketers endeavour to engage with consumers by creating consumer experiences through brand-related content. Non-media organisations have thus also become publishers of their brands although there are no clear-cut guidelines but numerous perspectives on how to communicate brand content by means of storytelling. This study explores, identifies and explains types of consumer experience which were evident on the Coca-Cola Journey corporate website, one of the world's leading brands at the time of the study. A theoretical perspective is adopted that borrows from and is also adapted from both media management and marketing communication. Brand storytelling is theoretically delineated and then applied to the proposed types of consumer experience which could be created through content for media organisations, as put forward by Peck and Malthouse (2011). The content on the Coca-Cola website is narrowed down for analysis and then explained using this perspective. The findings offer insight into the type of brand stories that marketers could consider when drafting content marketing strategies for non-media organisations.*

**Keywords:** brand content, brand storytelling, content marketing, consumer experiences, content marketing strategy, corporate website

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## INTRODUCTION

“The value of a good story is priceless” (Hermansson 2008).

This study delineates brand storytelling on Coca-Cola's corporate website, which is well-known for its innovative brand storytelling techniques (Pulizzi 2012b; Interbrand 2014). In this way, a theoretical perspective is adopted that borrows and is adapted from both media management and marketing communication. Brand stories conveyed on Coca-Cola's website (a non-media organisation) are explicated by applying proposed types of consumer experience which could be created through content for media organisations (Peck & Malthouse 2011) in the context of the theoretical requirements of brand storytelling. Although there has been a rapid increase in academic research on brand storytelling, there is still a paucity of research on how non-media organisations actually convey stories anchored in brand-related content.

A brand is a multi-disciplinary concept – hence the wealth of definitions of the concept. Opoku, Abratt, Bendixen and Pitt (2007) define a brand as a “symbol around which social actors, including firms, suppliers, supplementary organizations, the public and customers construct identities”. This definition of a brand is adopted for this study because it is seen as a personality or “set of human characteristics associated with a brand” upon which marketers rely to facilitate purchases and gain a competitive advantage (Aaker 1997). Herstein and Zvilling (2011) argue that the role of a brand can be seen from the perspective of the manufacturer or the consumer. For the manufacturer, the role of the brand is to separate a product from that of the competitor through its unique features, while consumers perceive the role of the brand as facilitating expression of their own personalities, and thus also as a “form of self-expression”. The role of the brand for this study is seen from the perspective of the consumer who embraces the notion of a “new brand”. The new brand invites consumers to participate on their own terms in order to enhance their own worlds and build a relationship with the brand through experiences, metaphors and stories (Burnett & Hutton 2007). Research by Woodside, Sood and Miller (2008) confirms that consumers use brands as “personification” in stories they describe about themselves as well as others.

According to Hermansson (2008), storytelling is part of human communication. When used by an organisation to build a connection with employees and customers, emotions and feelings can be evoked in the target audience which also facilitates conveying complicated messages. Similarly, brand storytelling is increasingly being used by marketers to convey the story of the brand to arouse an emotional response in the organisation's target audience and to create mutual understanding. Shankar, Elliot and Goulding (2001) argue that in the era of new media, consumers have greater access to countless media, and organisations thus face the challenge of reaching them because of information overload and

fierce competition. Traditional marketing, although still popular, now also poses challenges because of the technology available to block commercials. Sharing compelling brand stories through various new media enables organisations to break through the clutter and capture the right target audience's attention. Social media, in particular, has the potential to share brand stories virally through electronic word of mouth (eWOM).

Based on an analysis of the research findings, the article concludes with the types of consumer experience that were evident on the Coca-Cola Journey corporate website at the time of the study and which could help marketers to draft their own content marketing strategies.

## **BRAND STORYTELLING AS A BRANDING TECHNIQUE**

All brands have a story to tell and marketers increasingly use this branding technique to engage with consumers to enable them to connect with the brand. Brand storytelling, also known as narrative branding, has now also become part of the digital environment where there is even more opportunity for brands to connect with the target audience.

Brand storytelling is an evolving branding technique which involves continuous narratives about the brand. According to Bartel and Garud (2009), narratives describe events through a plot; thus, in a structured manner. Kemp, Childers and Williams (2012) explain that brand storytelling typically uses persuasion to convey beliefs to the target audience on which they can base their own identities. Branding thus creates awareness about the organisation and what it stands for using different branding techniques. Various branding terms exist, for example, "emotional branding", "experiential branding", "relationship branding", or "brand equity", which all involve a relationship between the brand and the consumer (Burnett & Hutton 2007).

Branding techniques are usually aimed at building relationships and touching the emotions of consumers. According to Bostos and Levy (2012), the brand image represents an advance in branding in that consumers who need to make daily choices about which brands to choose, are now guided by their brand perception. Through various branding techniques, organisations promote the value, image, prestige and lifestyle of their brands (Kemp *et al.* 2012). It is argued that all brands have a potential story to tell, but that some brands are more factual about the way in which they choose to tell the story.

According to Denning (2006), the brand story is usually told by the product or service, the customer (word-of-mouth), or even by a convincing third party. In this regard, Herskovitz and Crystal (2010) refer to "persona-focused storytelling" which means that the brand's story usually begins with the spoken form of a

brand's character or personality. All brand story elements should thus focus on this personality to connect the brand story as a whole, thereby making the brand more recognisable instead of telling incoherent brand stories. Brand story elements usually include a theme, characters, a plot and a setting.

## **CONVEYEING BRAND STORIES THROUGH BRAND-RELATED CONTENT**

Lieb (2012) indicates that the emphasis is no longer on advertising and buying media, but on publishing for and engaging with customers on platforms where they can be found. Creating and sharing content is a way of extending the brand story beyond advertising and is a means of personalising the brand by enhancing brand experiences (Pulizzi & Barrett 2009; Pulizzi 2013a; 2013b). However, quality content should be published using the numerous online tools available; it could be aimed at educating, informing, connecting, entertaining and creating trustworthiness (Lieb 2012). Jefferson and Tanton (2013) reiterate that quality content should include useful content based on the organisation's knowledge, expertise and ideas, tailor-made for different types of customers. In this regard, Williams (2013) emphasises the fact that content should be created with a brand story in mind, which could be about the organisation's history, culture, mission, inspiration, goals, audience and reasons for existing, including why its products and services are special, to name but a few.

According to Harad (2013), content marketing, sometimes referred to as a branded integration or brand journalism, relates to frequently sharing relevant and unique published information with the organisation's target audience, based on brand stories on various media platforms, not only to align with but also to reinforce the brand in their minds. It thus consists of brand stories by the organisation not aimed at immediate selling, but instead generating interest in the organisation and building trust and long-term relationships which could financially benefit the organisation in the long term. Similar concepts include custom publishing, branded storytelling, corporate content, info-content and information marketing (Pulizzi & Barrett 2009).

Pulizzi (2012a; 2012b) argues that storytelling is at the core of content marketing to attract and retain customers; it can be used in both traditional and online media. In addition, storytelling "humanises" the organisation, making it more accessible to the target audience. In this regard, Chiu, Hsieh and Kuo (2012) argue that brand storytelling is an effective way to share valuable information about the organisation with its target audience because stories create emotional associations with and foster a better understanding of the brand. Studies in the fields of advertising, leadership and information processing, for example, indicate that consumers interpret their exposure to and experience with brands through stories

(Woodside 2010; West, Huber & Min 2004; Deighton, Romer & McQueen 1989). According to Barker and Gower (2010), storytelling as a communication method appreciates the fact that all humans can be storytellers with the power to create their own reality of experiences, establish common ground with others, and build social relationships (cf. Soin & Scheytt 2006).

Pulizzi (2012a) explains the difference between content created for a media organisation and for a non-media organisation. For a media organisation, content is created in order to make a profit through paid content or advertising sales and to increase and retain readership. However, for a non-media organisation, content is created, not to profit directly from the content, but indirectly, to attract and retain customers through, among other things, brand storytelling. Lieb (2012) refers to this strategy as pulling content to the consumer by being attracted to and interested in it and thus being more receptive to the message. Brand goals are rooted in generating content through search engine optimisation (writing content in such a way that it will be found through search engine keyword searches), lead generation (eventual conversion into sales), or investing in social media tools to manage brand-related conversations (Pulizzi 2012a; 2012b; 2013a; 2013b).

Lieb (2012) states that many organisations use content to augment their traditional marketing efforts and also replace traditional marketing efforts by relying only on quality published content. Customers who are engaging with content in, say, social and online media, create links to this content and share it with a much wider audience, resulting in eWOM. eWOM, a form of viral marketing, refers to the spontaneous sharing of interesting information with other users of online and social media using various online content sharing tools. Martin and Lueg (2013) explain that eWOM is more visible and accessible than traditional word of mouth (WOM) and may thus influence a massive number of potential global customers. eWOM, including WOM, is also perceived to be more credible and impartial because the source does not “have a vested interest” in the receivers’ response to the communication. Fournier and Avery (2010) refer to consumers creating and disseminating brand content as open source branding, during which the users become active influencers of the brand. Open source branding is thus “participatory, collaborative and socially-linked”.

When information is shared virally it is considered by marketers to be successful as the Internet consists of a great deal of clutter, which makes it extremely difficult to attract the necessary attention (Ho & Dempsey 2010; Lin & Huang 2006). However, Bell (2012) reiterates that social media should not be treated merely as another advertising channel, but that modern consumers want helpful information to assist them with their daily lives.

Engaging with the brand through relevant and useful published stories provides added value and exposure to the brand. Boatwright, Cagan, Kapur and Saltiel (2009) explain that in order for a brand to be valuable, it should also provide value to consumers. The brand identity should thus be linked to customer needs and be at the core of all aspects of the organisation, including brand storytelling. According to Singh and Sonnenburg (2012), brand storytelling not only enhances consumers' association with a brand, but social media also makes the consumer an active participant in the sense that conversations are created between consumers and the brand, also promoting user-generated brand content. Social media include but are not limited to discussion forums, blogs, social networking platforms, video, photographs and news-sharing sites.

### **Media organisations' content applied to non-media organisations: Proposed types of consumer experience**

This study adopts and adapts theoretical perspectives applicable to both media management and marketing communication. The focus of the analysis is on applying the proposed types of consumer experience generated through content for media organisations, as proposed by Peck and Malthouse (2011), to the corporate website of a non-media organisation. This proposal also suggests that branded content should centre around sharing different types of stories on multi-platforms to enhance consumer experiences and engagement, which are based on extensive consumer research in the United States. Peck and Malthouse (2011) propose that when brand content for media organisations is generated, it should focus on creating any of eight types of consumer experience identified through consumer research, as explained in Table 1 below. All of these types of consumer experience are based on how the brand fits into the daily lives of consumers.

Peck and Malthouse (2011) perceive engagement as “the collection of experiences that readers, viewers, or visitors have with a media brand”, a perspective which is also adopted for this study in the context of brand storytelling for non-media organisations. Experiences refer to how consumers believe the brand fits into their daily lives. Because of information overload, the organisation should have an editorial voice and content related to experiences that are central to the brand's concept and of use to consumers (Peck & Malthouse 2011).

Table 1 below indicates how the types of consumer experience through content proposed for media organisations can be applied to non-media organisations.

**TABLE 1: APPLICATION OF TYPES OF CONSUMER EXPERIENCE CREATED THROUGH CONTENT FOR MEDIA ORGANISATIONS TO NON-MEDIA ORGANISATIONS**

Type of consumer experience	Explanation for media organisations	Application to non-media organisations
Civic	Providing a value-added experience by offering solutions to problems in society, exposing misconduct and thus remaining essential to retain readers (Shearer 2011).	Providing value to consumers by giving them brand-related content that provides solutions in their daily lives and at the same time retaining them (Pulizzi 2012a; 2012b; Boatwright <i>et al.</i> 2009).
Makes me smarter	Creating engaging experiences in convenient ways that would encourage repeated use and lead to viral marketing by audience members. Customers' knowledge and self-image should be improved (Youngman 2011).	Providing useful brand-related content (educating, informing) that could be continuously shared among users across different media platforms to improve their knowledge of the product or service which will benefit their lives (Lieb 2012; Williams 2013; Jefferson & Tanton 2013).
Anchor camaraderie	Creating and sharing useful and meaningful information by a news anchor in short sections, easy-to-understand language, promoting a feeling of friendship (Bennett 2011).	Providing content central to the brand's concept which creates a feeling of familiarity with the brand. Engaging consumers with interesting brand stories which personalise the organisation's products and services (Dahlen <i>et al.</i> 2010; Lieb 2012).
Community-connection	Addressing the motivations for a user's participation in online conversations, as well as the value derived from the conversations and content supplied by others (Gordon 2011).	Affording users the opportunity to participate in online conversations and to benefit from sharing and receiving useful content with and from fellow community members (Dahlen <i>et al.</i> 2010; Lieb 2012).
Social identity	Creating and sharing content that will augment the audience's emotional connection with the social group who also consume the same content (Mersey 2011).	Conveying a brand's character or personality through persona-focused storytelling and making consumers feel part of and significant to the brand community (Herskovitz & Crystal 2010).
Utilitarian	Providing a platform for both audience members and creators to share experience relating to learning and improving themselves (Peck 2011).	Consumers providing useful brand-related content that is both educational and informational, which will assist other consumers in their daily lives (Williams 2013).

Type of consumer experience	Explanation for media organisations	Application to non-media organisations
Inspiration	Providing content that will make consumers feel good about themselves and inspire them to achieve the same results as others (Whitaker 2011).	Providing useful content which is also inspiring and will excite consumers to share it with friends, families and peers (Lieb 2012; Williams 2013; Jefferson & Tanton 2013).
Co-producing	Attracting consumers to the productive efforts of the audience contributing to the conversations on the platform (Humphreys 2011).	Consumers actively participate in the conversation by being encouraged to add to the brand content by telling and sharing their own stories about the brand. Users become brand influencers (Fournier & Avery 2010; Denning 2006).
Timeout	Establishing how the reader spends time relaxing and establishing contact points for media consumption, and then linking this to the organisation's mission and vision. It is thus important to ascertain how the reader experiences the content (Wolter 2011).	Providing content that reflects the realities of how and where consumers consume the product(s) and or service(s). Portraying the brand as part of the lifestyle of consumers (Kemp <i>et al.</i> 2012).

## THE CORPORATE WEBSITE

Organisations today need to have a strong online presence which is not only considered a competitive advantage, but also fulfils strategic objectives. In particular, an online presence in the form of a website creates greater awareness of an organisation's products and services (Heinze & Qing 2006). The corporate website remains an essential tool for an organisation to convey information about its activities and to connect with its target audience. Typical information that is conveyed via a website includes an organisation's corporate strategy, history, environmental concerns, human resource management principles, organisational culture, social responsibility, code of ethics, corporate objectives, organisational values, vision, awards achieved, and business philosophy (Llopis, Gonzalez & Gasco 2010). This is also confirmed by Fernando (2009), who argues that the corporate website is continuously used by organisations to convey information about their corporate culture and values (cf. Fernando 2009). According to Llopis *et al.* (2010), the culture of an organisation is its "personality", which every member of an organisation needs to understand. A longitudinal study of 500 websites for a period of six years by Heinze and Qing (2006) indicated that websites have become increasingly interactive, have more content, and are more geared towards customer service. It is also essential for a website to create a positive impression with users after their first visit and interaction.

## **Coca-Cola's 'Journey'**

Coca-Cola, one of the world's most valuable brands and the largest beverage company with more than 500 brands sold in more than 200 countries, is renowned for its powerful brand storytelling techniques to engage its customers (Pulizzi 2012a; Interbrand 2014). According to Montgomery (2012) and Elliot (2012), as a result of continuous efforts to enhance engagement with its customers, in 2012, Coca-Cola revamped its corporate website as a "highly visual, sharable digital magazine" known as *Journey*, named after an earlier in-house employee magazine. It thus uses its website to integrate stories with its brand. Using consumer feedback to continuously publish relevant and valuable content, themes on the website at the time of the study included the front page, brands, videos, food, music, and *Unbottled* (the most popular and featured blog posts) categories. In addition, articles included were on business, sustainability, history, innovation, jobs, culture and sport; the ten most popular stories; articles just poured (submitted) and longer more in-depth articles; and stories chosen by its employees. The Coca-Cola company deemed it important that business-oriented content, such as investor information, job postings and news releases, should be kept after the revamp in 2012 (Elliot 2012).

The revamped Coca-Cola website was not available internationally, including in South Africa, when this study was done. Hence, only the international US website was analysed to provide a snapshot of the types of consumer experience which were evident on the website, in accordance with Peck and Malthouse's (2011) perspective.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The aim of this study was to answer the following research questions:

Research question 1: How can the proposed types of consumer experience of content for media organisations be applied to brand storytelling in non-media organisations?

Research question 2: What types of consumer experience were evident on the Coca-Cola Journey website at the time of the study?

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a worldview based on the interpretive research paradigm in that the researcher tried to understand, explore and interpret social reality dealing with qualitative data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007; Creswell 2007). The researcher qualitatively evaluated the Coca-Cola *Journey's* new corporate website to obtain an idea of the types of consumer experience that could have been generated through brand content, in accordance with Pick and Malthouse's (2011)

perspective. The perspective identified in Table 1 for non-media organisations and applied to brand storytelling for non-media organisations consequently guided the researcher in the analysis. The content on the Coca-Cola website was regarded as socio-cultural “texts” and is thus described and explored from a qualitative perspective to uncover conformity with the proposed types of consumer experience created through content for non-media organisations (cf. Gibson 2011).

### **Sample and unit of analysis**

It should be kept in mind that website content is dynamic and thus ever changing, and in many instances could consist of thousands of pages, making the sample size impracticable to handle (Heinze & Qing 2006). It is thus acknowledged that the website content analysed at the time of the study could have differed from its current content. The unit of analysis was a social artefact, namely the Coca-Cola *Journey* corporate website's most obvious brand-related content.

To first gain an understanding of the large content, as well as structure of the Coca-Cola *Journey* website at the time of the study, the researcher had to use several techniques to narrow down the analysis. This included using content auditing software to structure the website in terms of its most prevalent topics, and then using Issue Discovery, a heuristic data exploration tool, to confirm and further explore these issues. The Issue Discovery tool was developed by the Digital Methods Initiative, which was established in 2007 as a research programme at the University of Amsterdam (Rogers 2013; Gibson 2011). Konopásek's (2008) guidelines were followed to first make the data more visible to facilitate the analysis, before using Atlas Tii, an empirical software tool for qualitative data analysis, to better understand the vital issues. Once the main issues on the Coca-Cola *Journey* website had been identified, a total of 1 001 relevant files in Word format were examined more closely using the Atlas Tii software.

### **Data analysis**

Since Issue Discovery is more of a data exploration tool, it was also necessary to use an empirical tool such as Atlas Tii for further understanding of the types of consumer experience which would be evident from the main issues identified. Atlas Tii as a powerful data analysis tool was thus used to work through the electronic files in the sample, to underline important text, writing and editing notes, and to search for text in accordance with types of experience (Smit 2002) in Table 1.

## **DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION**

The findings of the study are now explained in accordance with the types of consumer experience as postulated by Peck and Malthouse (2011), and adapted for brand stories for non-media organisations.

## **Types of consumer experience**

The following types of consumer experience were identified on the basis of the brand stories on the Coca-Cola *Journey* website at the time of the study.

### *Civic*

The Coca-Cola company plays an active role in finding solutions to problems in society. These solutions are communicated on the Coca-Cola *Journey* website through brand-related stories. The civic-type of experience is thus evident on the Coca-Cola *Journey* website through, say, the Empowering Women category, where users can read and join the conversation about the role Coca-Cola plays in uplifting women in society by empowering them to become entrepreneurs and thus independent. This conversation was carried forward on the microblogging site Twitter under the hashtag #5by20 (the name of Coca-Cola's business skills training course). On the website, Coca-Cola explains under various categories what it does, how it does it, the progress on its women empowerment endeavours, and success stories. This is then further explicated in terms of its most shared stories, recapped stories, most watched stories, and the most discussed stories on Twitter.

The civic-type experience on the Coca-Cola *Journey* website was in the Behind the Bottle category, which explains its role in innovative technology (referred to as plant bottle technology), which is a more environment-friendly interior fabric used by Ford vehicle manufacturers.

Stories about Coca-Cola's sustainability report also indicate how it enhances people's personal well-being, building stronger communities and protecting the environment. Instead of simply presenting the sustainability report, important issues in the report are shared by means of articles, videos and stories, making it more accessible to the consumers.

### *Makes me smarter*

Brand stories on the Coca-Cola website are aimed at educating consumers about the company's different products by linking the brand to consumers' daily lives and by making it more accessible by giving it an entertaining slant. The website provides both informational and enlightening content through its food, music, recipes, videos and discovery of new music categories. Thousands of brand-related videos, recipes using different Coke brands, as well as music videos linked to the Coca-Cola brand not only entertain website visitors, but also provide them with information they can use in their daily lives. For example, brand story content in the Opener category on the website provides useful information on daily issues such as career advice, practical do-it-yourself tips, a do-it-yourself cabinet makeover, five ways to generate breakthrough ideas, nine ways to boost energy at the office, and five ways to blast perfectionism and get your work done. This brand-related

content is ultimately aimed at improving consumers' knowledge about Coca-Cola and its various brands, including the versatility of its uses. This type of story is also easily shared virally, adding to the conversation about the Coca-Cola brand.

### *Anchor camaraderie*

All Coca-Cola's brand stories centre on the brand concept of sharing happiness, which is part of the brand personality of the Coca-Cola brand. It is evident from the brand stories published on the Coca-Cola website that besides the central brand concept of sharing happiness, all its content is aimed at making the Coca-Cola brand part of the daily lives of consumers through brand stories on what its products are like or how they can be used. Through its helpful content on the website, consumers become familiar with the brand, while carrying out ordinary daily tasks such as preparing food or listening to music. The Coca-Cola brand thus advocates happiness to its consumers, which is central to its brand stories about how consumers feel when they drink Coca-Cola. A feeling of camaraderie with the Coca-Cola brand is created by means of central editorial brand content through brand stories based on sharing happiness.

### *Community connection*

As a digital magazine, the Coca-Cola *Journey* website provides ample opportunities for users to connect with other users who consume its brands through real-time conversations, and at the same time personalising the Coca-Cola brand. For example, through its front page and brand category pages on its website, consumers can connect with other users via social media networking sites such as Google+, Twitter (using various hashtags), Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Redditt, Instagram and LinkedIn, where they can join the conversation about the brand or follow conversation feeds from each of these sites. In addition, numerous blog posts were shared on the blogging platform referred to as *Unbottled*. Consumers can also subscribe to the Coca-Cola newsletter, *The Optimist*, via its website to further connect with the community.

Constant efforts are made to engage consumers with interesting brand stories. For example, at the time of the study, a Twitter chat was held about the future of brand journalism hosted by the Vice President of Corporate Communications at Coca-Cola, grouped under the hashtag #Cokecomm, and users could also join the conversation via the website. Real-time conversations are held, and users are motivated to participate via the website.

### *Social identity*

Coca-Cola's brand character or personality, namely that of sharing happiness, was evident throughout brand stories on the website. For example, in the *Unbottled* category, at the time of the study, numerous blog postings containing brand stories

about happiness were shared. These stories were posted by consumers and Coca-Cola employees, which indicate that consumers feel part of the Coca-Cola brand. These postings are also significant for the Coca-Cola community in the sense that their own happiness may inspire other consumers (see also the co-producing category below). The persona-focused brand stories on the Coca-Cola website enhance the feeling of identification with the Coca-Cola brand, as well as with consumers who also consume Coca-Cola products.

### *Utilitarian*

This type of consumer experience is similar to the makes me smarter type of experience, except that the focus is also on the consumer sharing of useful brand-related content to assist other consumers of the Coca-Cola brand in their daily lives. The Coca-Cola website does not provide evidence of such consumer experiences and the effort seems to be more on the part of Coca-Cola employees. However, consumers do generate content on the website and on social media, but the focus is more on sharing fun experiences and happiness about the brand, as is evident in the section on co-producing below.

### *Inspiration*

There is a wealth of evidence of inspiring brand stories on the Coca-Cola website, especially in the *Unbottled* category for its blog posts. Its brand personality, that of sharing happiness, aims at conveying inspiring moments in which to share happiness, which Coca-Cola considers as part of its heritage. This concept is carefully integrated with its brand stories on the website. For example, at the time of the study, a total of 6 880 videos, 475 articles, 90 blog posts, 23 downloadable images, 22 third-party articles, 13 recipes and four debates conveyed stories focusing on inspirational topics in order to create and share happiness for those who consume Coca-Cola products. The brand story content on the Coca-Cola website is aimed at making consumers feel good about themselves, and also to inspire them to improve themselves.

### *Co-producing*

Consumers actively participate in the Coca-Cola brand content as co-producers and are continuously invited to share and create content. Users can, for example, upload pictures of themselves on the website showing happy moments while consuming Coca-Cola products. In addition, users can share pictures and upload videos of them being creative with their spare empty Coca-Cola bottles. For example, in the *Unbottled* category of the website, users can share pictures and videos of what they do when they are not at the office and they are in their happy place (as part of the Out of Office series). This also includes videos and pictures of Coca-Cola's employees.

### *Timeout*

Consumers are encouraged to share their happy moments on the Coca-Cola website or on various social media while consuming Coca-Cola products by uploading and sharing their videos or images. In addition, they are invited to share images or videos of what they are doing when they are not at the office and while consuming Coca-Cola products. The Coca-Cola brand thus features prominently when consumers are relaxing. For example, brand stories also featuring Coca-Cola as part of the lifestyle of consumers depict them using Coca-Cola recipes and consuming Coca-Cola outside of the workplace (see also the co-producing and makes me smarter experiences).

### **Interpretation of the findings**

Regarding Research question 1, the proposed types of consumer experience pertaining to content for media organisations could be applied to brand storytelling in non-media organisations in that only the aim of the brand stories might be different. For non-media organisations, the emphasis would be more on long-term consumer engagement through consumer experiences than on making an immediate profit (Pulizzi 2012a).

Concerning Research question 2, several types of consumer experience were evident on the Coca-Cola *Journey* website at the time of the study. These brand stories could be applied to Peck and Malthouse's (2011) types of consumer experience, namely civic, makes me smarter, anchor camaraderie, community connection, social identity, inspiration, co-producing and timeout (see Table 1). Brand stories at the time of the study could however not entirely be applied to the utilitarian type of consumer experience when it comes to consumers sharing useful brand content because the effort seems to be more on the part of Coca-Cola employees to provide practical content to assist consumers of the Coca-Cola brand in their daily lives.

By engaging consumers with relevant and useful brand stories, the Coca-Cola brand gains added value and exposure. The brand itself thus provides value to consumers and is linked to Coca-Cola's brand personality (cf. Boatwright *et al.* 2009).

It is evident from the Coca-Cola website that its content is created to attract and retain customers through useful brand stories which consumers can experience in different ways. Consumers are pulled towards the highly interactive content, are receptive to the brand message (cf. Lieb 2012), and become active participants in the brand conversations (cf. Singh & Sonnenburg 2012). In addition, via the corporate website, consumers are directed to brand stories and conversations on multiple platforms, which are shared with others via eWOM (cf. Martin & Lueg 2013). Consumers thus have numerous experiences with the Coca-Cola brand in a way that fits into their daily lives. Brand stories are related to the brand personality of Coca-Cola, namely that of

sharing happiness, which is central to the brand's concept (cf. Peck & Malthouse 2011). Furthermore, the Coca-Cola brand is humanised through various brand experiences (cf. Pulizzi 2013a; 2013b). Coca-Cola brand stories are aimed at educating, connecting, informing and entertaining, and creating trust, and are tailor-made for different types of customers (Jefferson & Tanton 2013).

## **LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY**

The researcher acknowledges the following limitations of the study:

The findings only provide a snapshot of the types of consumer experience evident on the Coca-Cola Journey corporate website at the time of the study. The findings are thus not necessarily applicable to the current content on this corporate website. The purpose of the study was also not to generalise the findings, but only to provide a snapshot of the types of consumer experience evident at the time of the study which could be of use to the content marketing strategies of marketers.

Since the consumers were not part of the study, they could have experienced the brand stories differently from what is proposed in the findings. However, it should also be acknowledged that the analysis was strictly guided by the findings of intensive consumer research in the United States, which could have value for the future content marketing strategies of marketers.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The findings only represent the types of consumer experience as proposed by Peck and Malthouse (2011), that were evident on the Coca-Cola website at the time of the study. These findings could however differ from the current situation owing to the dynamic nature of the highly interactive Coca-Cola *Journey* website, which is in the format of a digital magazine. The findings were thus congruent with reality at the time of the study only. Marketers will hopefully benefit from the findings with regard to the type of content that they could create for brand storytelling when constructing content marketing strategies for their organisations. Currently, there are no clear guidelines and a paucity of academic research on this topic. Consumers of the Coca-Cola brand can relate to the brand in that it is communicated as fitting into their daily lives, which may create different types of experiences through engagement with brand content on multiple platforms. The persona-focused storytelling also connects the brand stories as a whole, thereby making the Coca-Cola brand more recognisable.

It is recommended that future studies should include the evaluation of more organisations that use brand storytelling effectively; Peck and Malthouse's (2011) proposed types of consumer experience via consumer research should also be tested in other countries. Once the digital magazine format of the United States website is rolled out in South Africa, the South African website could also be evaluated.

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