

THE CULTURAL PARADIGM IN MARKETING

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Abstract. The paper presents the nature and the underlying principles of the cultural paradigm in marketing, corresponding with the concept of value-based marketing. In management sciences, the postulated paradigm may be considered equivalent to the symbolic-interpretive perspective. The transition to the cultural paradigm is a response to the increased role of cultural factors and trends upon the market. The role of cultural codes is presented in the context of identification and anticipation of consumer expectations, with examples of best practices in building culture associations around products. This approach is manifested in the concept of cultural branding and in the development of communication styles and forms adjusted to the generated cultural construct of the product. Another effective method of approach is the use of brand storytelling, designed to engage emotional response from customers as a way of increasing their brand identification and involvement.

Key words: paradigm, marketing, values, culture, branding, storytelling

IN SEARCH OF A NEW MARKETING PARADIGM

The development of marketing sciences stimulates the need to define the cognitive framework of the field to ensure the versatility of studies, while placing proper emphasis on the main dimensions of marketing and the available knowledge (schools and models), and with the intention of producing new paradigms to meet the requirements of management sciences.

The first stage in the task of defining the cognitive paradigm of marketing is the identification of elements that distinguish marketing from other scientific concepts and disciplines. Based on literature studies, the following characteristics may be postulated as specific for the marketing orientation:

- the emphasis on processes taking place in the market environment;
- concentration on target markets;

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- customer-oriented approach – creating customer value;
- marketing research as basis for the design of strategies and activities;
- market influence based on a cohesive set of instruments;
- integration of forms and instruments of communication with the environment;
- creativity in marketing thinking;
- anticipation of market phenomena and processes.

The evolution of marketing as a concept may be approached from various perspectives, and emphasise different dimensions of the field under study. The following approaches can be of interest here:

- the scope – describing the key focus of marketing activities (product, customer, brand, value);
- the idea – transactional, strategic, partnership-based, value-based, holistic, marketing 3.0;
- the instruments – forms and mechanisms of market influence (marketing mix, integrated marketing, virtual marketing, social media marketing, affiliate marketing, sensory marketing);
- the structure – marketing in a selected sector, on a selected market, local, international, marketing in non-profit organisations.

In the course of the development of marketing as a field of study, new basic paradigms evolved, from the transaction marketing paradigm, through strategic and partnership paradigms, up to the present concept of value-based marketing paradigm (Table 1). The latter, widely regarded as an example of a cultural paradigm, postulates the need of adopting a holistic (i.e. multidimensional) approach to customers, taking into account not only the rational and emotional dimensions of this relation, but also the spiritual aspects associated with values that motivate their behaviours. In this way, values become a central idea for the design of mission, vision and marketing strategy of any organisation, and – on the operating level – a basis for the construction of product offer that responds not only to the specific practical (functional) needs, but also those of emotional and spiritual character.

Taking into account the typical approaches employed in the discipline of management sciences, it may be useful to emphasise the fundamental role of value management in the development of value-based marketing. The cultural context of this marketing concept is quite distinct, and results from the fact that the effectiveness of marketing in stimulating the markets and shaping the behavioural responses of customers is inherently determined by culture and its effects on customer perceptions, attitudes and market behaviours. The study of the role of individuals and groups in the perception of market and communication phenomena requires us to adopt the qualitative methodologies of social and human sciences, such as psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology. The symbolic-interpretive approach seems best suited for our purposes. As one of the cultural paradigms in management sciences (Table 2), the symbolic-interpretive approach allows for the use of key cultural metaphors, terms, research methods, and instruments of change. This is important, since the bulk of research in this area involves subjective, qualitative analyses, and the fundamental significance is placed on semantic networks identified in texts and other messages (e.g. word-play associations). Only by adopting a certain narrative approach, researchers may proceed with their subjective interpretation of the results obtained in the course of study.

Table 1. Paradigms of marketing

| Elements | The paradigm of transactional marketing | The paradigm of strategic marketing | The paradigm of partnership/relationship marketing | The paradigm of value-based marketing |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| The general principle of theory design | The significance of exchange | The significance of conflict and competition | The significance of interaction | The significance of value |
| The type of structural correlation between the elements of the studied area | Structural relations based on dominance of one of the parties of the exchange process | Structural relations based on competitive advantage over the rivalling party | Structural relations based on partnership | Structural relations based on cooperation in the creation of values |
| The predominant management science school (approach) | Market planning | Strategic market management | Interactive management, management of networked organisations | Value management |
| The predominant theoretical-methodological paradigm of social sciences | Neopositivist/functional paradigm | Radical structuralism paradigm | Interpretative paradigm | The symbolic-interpretive paradigm |
| The character of the marketing process | Transactional exchange with customers, stimulated by the marketing mix | Strategic and tactical-operating marketing process, systematically planned and based on external and internal synergy sources | Symbiotic, interactive marketing process based on lasting relations | Marketing process designed to correlate mission, vision and values of the organisation with the corresponding customer values |
| Value creation method | Focus on product and on other marketing instruments | Building competitive advantage based on elements that generate benefits for customers | Forming and improving relations with partners | A holistic approach to value creation, comprising also spiritual and cultural dimensions |
| Strategies of communication with customers | The strategy of adjustment to customer expectations, utilising a standard set of instruments | Creative marketing strategies | Interactive communication strategies | Strategies based on brand anthropomorphisation and storytelling |

Source: Own research based on Żabiński [2001] and Mazurek-Łopacińska [2008].

The search for a cultural paradigm in marketing should be evaluated in the context of the increased value expectations on the part of modern consumers, since emotional and spiritual values attached to personality and culture seem as important as the relational values between the participants of the marketing network or the purely functional values generated by the product and by other marketing instruments. Consequences of this

Table 2. Cultural paradigms in management sciences

| Criterion | The neo-positivist-functional-systemic paradigm | The symbolic-interpretive paradigm | Critical management studies | The postmodernist approach to management |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The significance of culture in management | Integrity, holism, cultural cohesiveness | Semantic networks, open interpretation, segmentation and subcultures | Oppressiveness, dominance, indoctrination, hidden power agendas | Relativity and subjectivity of interpretation |
| Methods of cultural research | Objectivised, quantitative, with survey as a predominant method | Subjective, qualitative, with predominance of textual analyses and the instruments of the anthropology of organisations | Qualitative involvement, with action research as the dominant approach | No research methods as such, glosses, metaphors, textualism |
| Methods of cultural change | Changes designed to optimise cultural impact | Design and development of new cultural meanings | Introduction of emancipating changes, such as empowerment, denaturalisation | No change methods as such, in-depth reflection |
| Dominant models and typologies | Based on key values | Cultures approached individually, to preclude generalisation | Based on forms of power | No models or typologies as such, only metaphors |
| Key metaphors | Machine, organism | Text, language, play on words (language games) | Prison, panopticon, colonisation of the mind | Happening, rhizomes, metanarrative |
| Prominent representatives | E. Schein, G. Hofstede, Ch. Handy | G. Morgan, L. Smircich, J. Van Maanen, M.J. Hatch | H. Willmott, M. Alvesson, N. Monin | G. Burrell, M.J. Hatch, B. Czarniawska |

Source: Sulkowski [2012].

approach are manifested in the adopted strategies and marketing activities of enterprises and other organisations. The cultural orientation should be emphasised at the earliest stages of marketing research, and designed to facilitate the identification cultural codes in customer behaviours. Also, the interpretation of these codes, as systems of semantic attributes attached to certain phenomena, individuals and processes, will surely be reflected in the selection of research methods and their nature, with clear dominance of approaches postulated by semiotics and the theory of signs. Correct identification of cultural codes prevalent in a given community or consumer segment allows for better adjustment of product offer – one that responds more accurately to market demand for specific values. The classical approach based on provision of specific product attributes is no longer adequate; to attract customers, companies need to construe cultural associations around products. If the product is perceived as an expression of attributes valued by customers, it has potential to become an object of ‘affection’. The specific role of brands – not only as stimulants of interest in products, but also as modifiers of personal image and lifestyle – elevates the importance of cultural branding. By understanding the need to define brand identity, companies may build effective networks of associations between the brand and the values sought after by target consumers.

This type of cultural approach does stimulate the formulation of the new marketing paradigm, but it must be accompanied by the use of new conventions in communicating brand image and brand identity. They should be based on storytelling associations formed around the brand and the product, and their effectiveness is a direct result of the natural human propensity for stories. The above approaches in value-based marketing constitute a fundament for the cultural paradigm construct (Fig. 1), which defines a cognitive framework for the explanation of market creation through marketing.

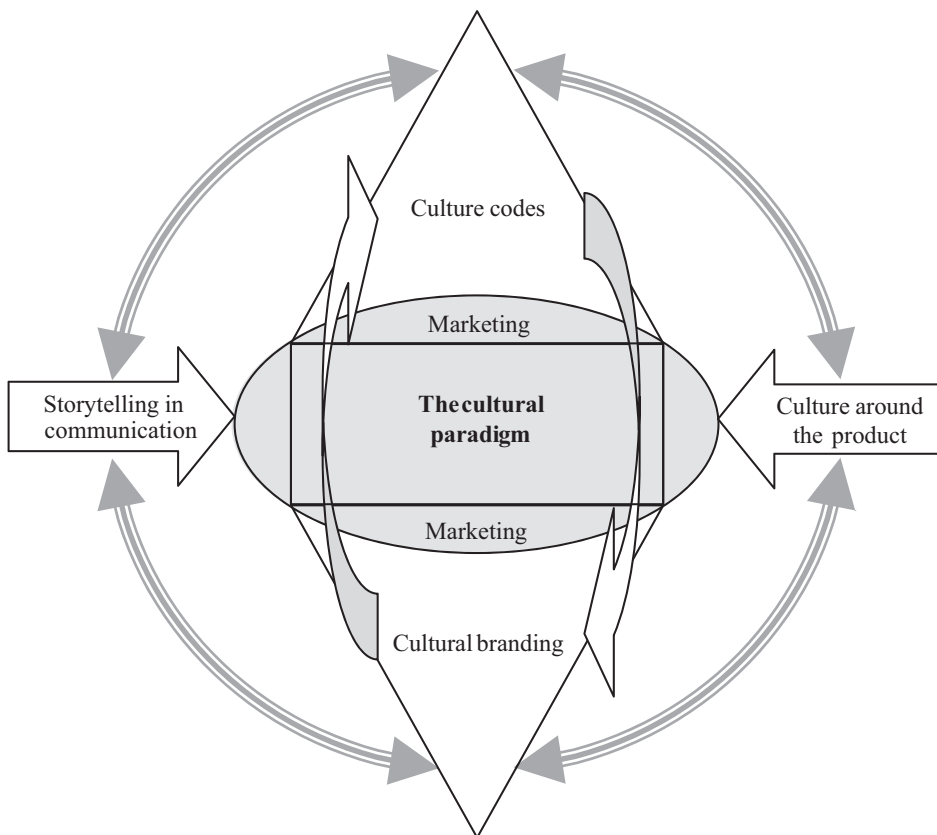


Fig. 1. The cultural paradigm in marketing
Source: Own research.

Consequently, the use of the cultural paradigm in marketing requires a careful examination of the socio-cultural trends that shape consumer behaviour. The role of culture in brand management can be exemplified by numerous success stories of iconic proportion, built around legends, such as: Marlboro, Harley Davidson, Volkswagen Beetle, Coca-Cola, and others.

CULTURAL CODES AND THEIR USE IN THE IDENTIFICATION AND ANTICIPATION OF CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS AND DESIRES

Messages communicated on modern markets should include associations to the cultural space of target consumers, and the key to reach them is to design such associations to the deepest structures of consumers' cultural constitution – those that shape and express desired values, orientation towards past/present/future actions, their perception of time, their outlook on individualism/collectivism, the significance attached by them to certain symbols, and so on. Thus, the effectiveness of communication relies on correct identification of consumers' cultural codes, since those constructs directly influence their perception of various phenomena and objects through attribution of meanings.

Examples of associations stimulated by popular categories and products offered on the US market (Table 3) show approaches to consumer insight which are in striking contrast to those observed in cultural codes of other nations.

The unavoidable clash between contrasting cultural codes may pose serious problems in the design of communication. A good example here is the story of a merger between Daimler-Benz and Chrysler and the resulting contrast of expectations, wherein the characteristic German emphasis on technology in car perception clashed with the American view of cars as instruments for the expression of individual self.

The structure of cultural codes is, naturally, shaped by the culture, since it represents mind programming patterns formed by individuals living in certain cultural environments and pursuing the culture-specific set of values and convictions. The most important elements in this context are those formed by the influence of cultural groups and those stimulated by individual traits, be it congenital or acquired through life experience. As emphasised by C. Rapaille, the study of cultural codes needs to respect the following principles:

1. Attitudes and intentions declared by consumers should be approached with caution, since they not necessarily translate into – or result in – specific behaviours.
2. Consumers should be asked to refer to experiences that triggered the strongest emotional response, since their memory imprint is typically the most vivid and culturally potent.
3. Consumer experiences collected at various stages of their life are of fundamental significance for the shaping of the cultural imprint that defines their mentality and their perception of phenomena.

Table 3. Cultural codes of American consumers, compared to those of other nations

| Number | Category | American | Other | |
|--------|----------|--|---|---------|
| 1 | Quality | It works | Perfection | Japan |
| 2 | Food | Fuel | Pleasure | France |
| 3 | Car | Personal integrity | Engineering | Germany |
| 4 | Shopping | Part of daily life | A lesson of national culture | France |
| 5 | Health | Movement | Harmony with nature | China |
| 6 | Marriage | Love, understanding, partnership, trust, respect | Compromise, trust, limitation, duty, life-long commitment | Japan |

Source: Own research based on: Rapaille et al. [1996].

4. To study the mechanisms of perception and reaction to different stimuli, researchers should employ a wide spectrum of research approaches that help identify the internalised cultural imprints.

Good understanding of cultural codes specific for a target group opens up potential for associating product features with potent cultural elements expressed in myths and archetypes. This makes it easier to attract customers by stimulating their thought processes – and not only those of conscious origin, but also those observed in the unconscious sphere, which seems to be the prime mover of customer responses (reactions) to marketing communication.

ARCHETYPE-BASED CULTURAL BRANDING

Cultural branding, as a new concept in brand management and image building, is a good example of practical expression of the cultural approach to modern marketing. The concept, postulated by D. Holt in 2004, is based on two pillars:

- true values, i.e. brand authenticity;
- human archetypes that express consumers' way of thinking.

In this approach, cultural archetypes become a fundament for brand positioning, with potential to build iconic brands. Their role in stimulating consumer behaviour, as emphasised by Holt, is a consequence of a good concept design that incorporates the following:

- a legend generated in response to consumer needs;
- a description of a historic social figure associated with the brand.

The most fundamental feature of an iconic brand is its association with a quality product. In addition, iconic brands are distinguished by their ability to respond to current trends – and not necessarily in terms of keeping up with the fashion.

Figure 2 presents two perspectives of approach to brand identity: the external (material) dimension of physical properties defining the product's utility, and the internal (immaterial) dimension expressed through personality, cultural values, self-image and mentality defining consumers' perception and interpretation of reality.

The functional value of brands is no longer potent enough to maintain consumer interest and brand identification. Modern consumers seem to place more and more emphasis on affinity, i.e. brand accordance with their values, lifestyle choices, mentality and culture. To respond to this trend, brand management utilises anthropomorphisation: by building brand image on human features, we can construe brand personality around its central characteristics, as defined in the brand profile.

The most frequent premise for brand anthropomorphisation (personification) is based on its potential to shape consumer interactions with the brand by stimulating satisfaction, incentive to buy and, ultimately, build customer loyalty. The above objectives can only be reached if the consumers are able to perceive and appreciate such brand features which correspond to their preferred and culturally determined lifestyle choices and values.

The effectiveness of cultural branding results from the fact that the unique personality profile of the brand has the effect of stimulating the purchase of brand-bearing products. At the same time, brand features seem to define target recipients, by expressing their

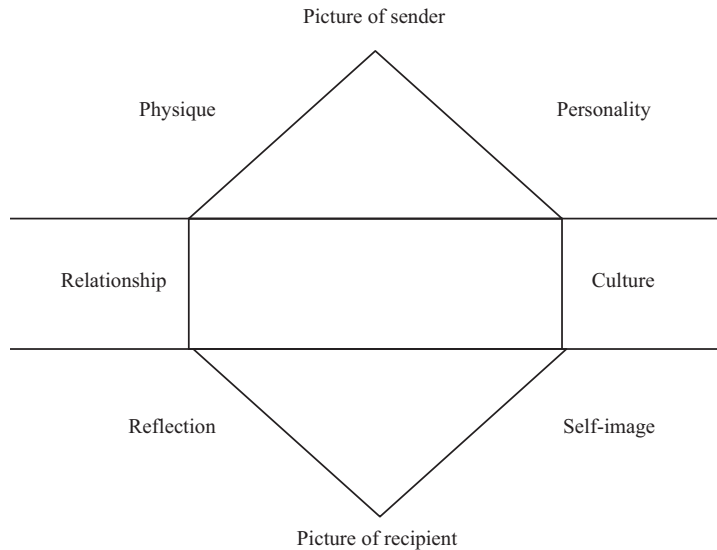


Fig. 2. Brand identity
Source: Kapferer [2012].

style. The profiles of iconic brands are easily identified, and therefore more likely to gather broad reception, or even a devoted following. Brands with clearly expressed personalities and identities are more effective in maintaining proper relations with their customers. Table 4 presents fundamental characteristics (personality traits) expressed in some of the more iconic brand profiles.

Brand anthropomorphisation processes employ specific images and symbols expressed in a potent visual form through innovative and unique design. One of the most spectacular forms of brand identity expression is the metaphor – an extremely effective instrument for the stimulation of customer perception, based on powerful associations with hidden or unconscious needs and values.

Table 4. Characteristics of selected iconic brands, as expressed in their brand profiles

| Brand | Characteristics |
|-----------------|---|
| Apple | Exceptionality, reliability |
| Benetton | Internal equilibrium, harmony with nature |
| Coca-Cola | Reliability, perfection, shared activities, success |
| Harley Davidson | Freedom, adventure, courage, breaking boundaries |
| BMW | Dynamics, energy, success |
| Mercedes | Safety, prestige, classic style |
| Adidas | Passion, involvement, courage, breaking boundaries |
| Starbucks | Inspiration, youth, friendship, independence |

Source: Own research.

The emphasis on the cultural dimensions of brand management strategies based on cultural branding is, at the same time, serves to strengthen brand credibility, which seems of particular importance in the context of the modern appreciation for authenticity.

At this point, it may be interesting to pose the following question: Does the setting of a brand in a specific cultural context necessitate the stability and firmness of values promoted in association with the brand. In line with the main premises of cultural branding, the effectiveness of brand management requires constant re-evaluation of promoted values in response to socio-cultural changes in the environment [Każmierczak 2013, Skubisz 2013]. Skilful handling of new challenges generated by changes in consumer trends and ideologies helps reinforce the brand's attribute of cultural innovation.

Good understanding of the mechanism of customer identification with brands helps companies increase their effectiveness in shaping customer preferences and attitudes.

One of the best exemplifications of this approach is the Apple brand. Their products, despite the relatively high price tags, are received with great interest, mainly due to specific features that discern them from the rest of computer, tablet and smartphone devices. As a result, they are favoured by artists, designers and other freelancing professionals. The unique identity of the Apple brand, designed by the visionary Steve Jobs, is perceived as exclusive and satisfying the needs of the most discerning users, those who take care in projecting their prestige and professional position. This is the power of brands built on legends, sets of attributes designed to stimulate imagination and emotions of potential customers.

Brand personality is therefore shaped by brand history, presented in a suggestive form of a 'legend'. Another good example of a brand built on an attractive legend is Harley Davidson: their products are strongly associated with such qualities as courage, freedom, strength, independence, and breaking boundaries.

To create an attractive legend, it is necessary to start with a promotion concept that accentuates some of the values sought after by the potential customers, both those resulting from their psychographic profiles and lifestyles, and those that inspire them to transform the existing styles. The effectiveness of a legend lies not only in skilful selection of communication instruments, but also (and most importantly) in transition into a new communication style: from unidirectional to bidirectional, from monologue to dialogue. Stimulating the interactive mechanisms requires a cultural change, since company employees need to acknowledge and appreciate the role of bidirectional communication with customers before they are able to utilise it effectively in the design and sale of products.

BRAND STORYTELLING IN COMMUNICATION

As suggested by the above observations, the most effective forms of communication are those that offer best potential for building strong relations with customers. They should be based on credible and emotionally infused messages, clearly associated with specific experiences and problems of a target consumer. The best way to approach it is through storytelling [Bazydło-Jankowski 2015], a narrative design to stimulate emotional response and increase customer involvement with the brand. Storytelling comes in many forms and utilises various methods of stimulating consumer identification with the brand. Ideally, a story should present a protagonist faced with a specific problem, and not necessarily of fundamental quality – even if the product itself is designed to satisfy fundamental needs. A good

example of such an approach is the *Real Beauty Sketches* campaign by Dove, addressed to women who tend to under-rate their looks [Grzybowska 2013]. The campaign stimulated a broad dispute on the standards of beauty and the nature of self-image and personal value. By exposing the unfounded self-image convictions, the story managed to make strong associations with the detrimental effects of idealised beauty standards propagated in popular culture – a source of stress and anxiety for many women nowadays:

For storytelling to be effective, it must be based on authentic values and presented through well-designed examples that stimulate interest and inspire disputes.

Below are some of the most popular types of stories that may be effectively used for brand storytelling purposes [Nieciecki 2012]:

- who I am stories – with focus on description of a product, brand or protagonist, emphasising transition, development, past errors and successes as basis for the design of brand or product image;
- why I am here stories – presenting ideas, concepts and premises behind company strategic and operating activities;
- vision stories – presenting suggestion for the use of new ideas and solutions, with emphasis on benefits for the consumer, the brand, and the natural environment;
- teaching stories – with focus on explaining and motivating the rationale behind specific activities in the context of company mission and strategic objectives.

The power of storytelling lies in its ability to trigger customer involvement and aspirations for self-realisation through sharing the company values and through the use of their products.

It must be noted here that storytelling is not limited to simple differentiation of the brand from the mass of competing products, but is designed to respond to specific social needs, motivations, aspirations and previously unrealised desires. The most popular approach to the identification of such desires is the use of metaphors in market communication processes. Deep metaphors seem particularly effective here, since they offer insight into fundamental, deeply rooted needs and values. And this type of values can be utilised regardless of the gender, age, education, profession, religion, cultural background, attitudes and experiences of the target, because it addresses more universal mechanisms inherent in cultural perception of observable phenomena, problems, and so on.

It seems that best effects in the identification of such mechanisms can be obtained through the use of seven classes of deep metaphors, namely the metaphors of: balance, transformation, journey, connection, container, resource, and control [Zaltman 2010].

Careful analysis of the above metaphors may help explain customer behaviours, identify rationales behind their decisions and understand their responses to marketing messages. Good understanding of consumers' mind paths, in turn, helps the company design a more effective strategy of market communication.

CONCLUSIONS

While the role of marketing in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviours cannot be underestimated, it seems that the present paradigm should be modified to emphasise the culture-building aspects of marketing. Modern marketing has become a central in-

strument for the formulation and realisation of values through consumption. Marketing activities and messages, through their form and content, effect a significant impact on consumer perception of reality. Marketing has the power to influence the aesthetics of these images, but its effectiveness relies on the accuracy in the identification of cultural trends and codes and in skilful use of the corresponding insights. This focus on cultural aspects of marketing forms a basis for the emergence of a new cultural paradigm defining directions and mechanisms to be used in all areas of marketing, from market research focused on the identification of cultural codes in consumer behaviours, through cultural branding, product and brand personification, to brand storytelling communicated over specific channels. The new cultural paradigm, correlated with the concept of value-based marketing, forms a fundament for the integration of all dimensions of individual needs in the process of building the product offer. As such, it should be incorporated at the earliest stage of business model design in any company or organisation.

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PARADYGMAT KULTUROWY W MARKETINGU

Streszczenie. W artykule przedstawiono przesłanki i istotę paradygmatu kulturowego marketingu, który odpowiada koncepcji marketingu bazującego na wartościach. Za odniesienie dla tego paradygmatu w dziedzinie nauk o zarządzaniu można uznać paradygmat interpretatywno-symboliczny. Przejście do paradygmatu kulturowego jest wynikiem oddziaływania na rynek czynników i trendów związanych z kulturą. Przedstawiono rolę kodów kulturowych w identyfikacji i antycypowaniu oczekiwań konsumentów, wskazując na udane praktyki tworzenia kultury wokół produktu. Wyrazem takich praktyk są koncepcje brandingu kulturowego oraz rozwój stylów i form komunikacji umiejętnie dostosowanych do wykreowanej kulturowej koncepcji produktu. Skuteczne okazują się formy opowieści o marce opracowane na podstawie historii wykreowanych w taki sposób, aby pobudzić emocje klienta i jego zaangażowanie w relację z marką.

Słowa kluczowe: paradygmat, marketing, wartości, kultura, branding, storytelling

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