Storytelling brand: An experience that creates a path for brand loyalty?

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Abstract

Storytelling brands are able to build meaningful consumer-brand relationships, due to their capacity to evoke emotions, create attachments and accomplish remembrance through symbolic contexts and powerful metaphors. The present study aims to evaluate if these relationships can constitute a path for brand loyalty. To evaluate this possibility, qualitative research was undertaken with 15 participants. They were asked to have an online brand experience with Ben & Jerry’s, a company that uses stories to transmit its values and corporate strategy. Later, they were interviewed to share their impressions, reactions, feelings, connections and memories that the interaction with the corporate website was capable to induce. Specifically, the intellectual and emotional dimensions of the brand experience were evaluated to determine if participants’ effects built bases for emotional and cognitive loyalty. The findings showed that effectively most of the participants were creating a path for brand loyalty through a storytelling brand experience. This empirical evidence supports the efficacy of storytelling as a communication tool. Furthermore, it makes marketers and managers think whether brand loyalty is more than repurchasing. Instead, it is becoming a relationship between consumers and brands, mediated by experiences.
Introduction

Brand loyalty is a concept that has been discussed extensively among marketers and academics (Brakus et al. 2009). Its definition has been centred in the fact of constant repurchasing of a product (Oliver, 1999). Marketers are busy finding the proper metrics to measure brand loyalty among consumers and the advertising strategy that can gain loyal consumers. However, they sometimes forget to figure out crucial aspects such as: Why do consumers buy their brands and what is behind the purchase decision? And, what consumers are doing with the brands? In this circumstance not the product or service is meant, but the brand.

Consumers are in a continuous construction of their personality and surround themselves with symbols that represent their values and lifestyles, including products and brands (Fog et al. 2005). What people consume is showing how they see and define themselves. Brands are becoming a source of self-expression, and they are building emotional bonds with people. Consumers are not asking for products, instead for unique experiences appealing to their dreams, emotions and lifestyles. Therefore, brands have to express core values through persuasive stories, to become part of consumers’ lives (Salzer-Mörling & Strannegård, 2004).

Nowadays, consumers pursue an active role within the consumption experience. They buy from companies that suit their personality and values. They want to know what exactly they are buying, and this goes beyond the functional features. Consumers are interested in details such as the production process, the country of origin, the employees’ working conditions, the complete process of the raw materials, the actions towards the society and the environment, and so forth. Hence, companies have to communicate with consumers through values, showing a deeper purpose than money to build trustful relationships between brands and consumers.

Companies should tell the real story of their processes and the brand has to provide a unique experience that allows consumers to develop their personality and reflect their lifestyle. Constructing affective bonds between brands and consumers and providing personalised experiences is the way to gain loyalty (Gentile et al. 2007). Companies like
Coca-Cola, Nike, Apple, Lego or Starbucks, owe their success not only to the products they offer. Instead to the story in which they frame their brands and values, which consumers use to define themselves and show their lifestyle (Fog et al. 2005; Woodside & Miller, 2010). These are storytelling brands, they are communicating with consumers through a narrative that facilitates the understanding of corporate facts. They tell about values in a dynamic context and transmits the brand’s meaning in a simple message, like Nike: “will to win” (Fog et al. 2005).

Loyal consumers are those who developed a meaningful relationship with a brand; based on affective bonds and trust. Storytelling brands develop this kind of connections due to the positive brand experience they can provide. Brand experience constitutes the consumer’s responses to the touching points or interactions between the organization and the brand (Brakus et al. 2009). Consequently, storytelling brand develop a way to reach loyal consumers.

This research evaluates how the effects of a storytelling brand experience can build bases for brand loyalty. To achieve this purpose, an online experience with Ben & Jerry’s website is analysed. This experience won’t include consumption or interaction with the physical product. In order to conclude if the first touching points with a storytelling brand are able to create affective bonds and proper understanding of the corporate facts, which settle down the bases for affective and cognitive loyalty.

The present study will start with the literature review, to illustrate the theoretical bases of the three axes of the research: storytelling brands, brand experience and brand loyalty. Then, the methodology will explain how the research was developed, taking Ben & Jerry’s as the base for the analysis, and how the data was analysed to obtain all the findings. Later on, some final thoughts about the consequences of the empirical evidence found will be described in the conclusion part as well as managerial implications. In the end, limitations and future research will be suggested.
Literature Review

The literature review states the theoretical bases of: storytelling brand, brand experience and brand loyalty. Storytelling brand is the context of the research, because its effectiveness to create bases for brand loyalty is tested. The concept is defined, including uses and reactions it produces on consumers. The interaction with a storytelling brand is framed into a brand experience, and this is the vehicle that allows participants to get in touch with Ben & Jerry’s. Therefore its concept is described including its four dimensions. Finally, brand loyalty is defined, and as it is an extensive topic in marketing, this literature is focusing on the tri-dimensional approach.

The research aims to show how the concept of brand loyalty is evolving. The market is moving to a relational and experiential approach. This literature illustrates the concepts that are already settled down in the theory, and the empirical evidence will support that strategies like storytelling are moving consumers to get bonds with brands and create bases for loyalty.

**Storytelling Brand**

In this section, storytelling is described as a communication and branding strategy for companies. It starts with a definition of story and moves to how a corporate story can be constructed. Finally, the storytelling brand features and effects are showed.

**What is a story?**

Stories have been the natural way of human communication since ancient times. They give meaning to our world and the events of our lives (Fog et al.2005). In general, stories speak about our values and background; they give continuity to our existence, transmitting our history (Twitchell,2004; Salzer-Mörling & Strannegård,2004; Mossberg,2008). Stories are always present; they are a way to express our emotions, our personality, our desires and our way of thinking.

Story is a narrative with two principal elements: chronology and causality (Escalas,2004a). The chronology develops the story through a sequence of events, which normally have a temporal order, allowing the structure of episodes with a
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beginning, middle part and end (Shankar et al. 2010). Secondly, causality is the relation between the different elements that facilitates the flow of the story and the development of the meaning. As Twitchell (2004) expressed “Stories are fictions filled with characters, plot, points of view, and an implied purpose called a meaning”; the meaning is the central purpose that a story aims to develop and deliver through the message.

**Storytelling in a company**

Companies are surrounded by stories of the CEO, employees, founders, consumers or stakeholders. They talk about the culture and values of the company. Consequently, it is not strange that a company decides to take all these tales to create a story to tell about its origin, corporate identity, the brand’s meaning and the values the company stands for (Fog et al. 2005).

The company story is built from within the company; with a clear and consistent message that involves values, vision and corporate culture (Fog et al. 2005). An effective storyteller says the truth (Guber, 2007; Salzer-Mörling & Strannegård, 2004). Transparency among companies and consumer is becoming a must to build strong relationships based on trust. If a company just cares about money, it won’t construct meaningful interactions with stakeholders. Contrary, if its story is telling about a depth reason for existence. It will develop a common mental vision among employees, consumers and other audiences; and this essence is a driving passion that will encourage them to share this story and become ambassadors of the company (Fog et al. 2005).

The core story of a company is showing the corporate essence and it is the trunk that holds other stories. One of them is the brand story. For example, Nike has a strong story that talks about “will to win” and their products stick to this spirit. However, a company like Procter and Gamble has diverse products and it has an independent story for each one of them, and the core story stays behind supporting the whole communication strategy (Fog et al. 2005). Storytelling is linked with holistic thinking, where every touching point with the company must show consistency, and the strong bases of the
core story provide coherence to the different stories that can be told about the company internally or externally.

The core story is created with all the data that comes from the stories that surround the organization; they constitute the raw material for storytelling. The process should consider four principal elements (Figure 1): message, conflict, characters and plot. **The message**, is the central ideological or moral idea developed through the story; it should be only one simple statement (Twitchell, 2004) that shows the company’s meaning and essence of the brand experience. Like Harley Davidson that is pursuing “freedom”, its message is about a rebel lifestyle (Fog et al.2005).

**Figure 1: The four elements of Storytelling and The fairy–tale model**

The **conflict** is the force that evokes action, emotion and involvement with the characters inside the story. Without a conflict, there is no story. It illustrates the barriers that a company has to overcome deliver the experience to consumers. The events show the values that the company defends and how it fights to achieve the dream that it would like to provide to consumers. For example, LEGO is fighting against passive entertainment to deliver “creative play”. Accordingly, the **characters** embody values and play specific parts into the story to create and solve the conflict. The fairy–tale model (Figure 1), offers classical roles that allow dynamic and complementation between them, they could be: benefactor, goal, beneficiary, supporter, hero or adversary. The audience can easily identify this characters, because they are already into their minds, hence the meaning is easier to understand and remember (Mossberg & Nissen-Johansen, 2006). Normally the company is the hero and the beneficiary is the consumer.
For example, Richard Branson is Virgin’s hero, he became the icon of his company (Fog et al. 2005).

The plot provides the natural flow of events giving sense to the story through beginning, middle part and end (Stern, 1994). The chronology and causality of the actions are fundamental for the amusement and overall experience of the audience (Fog et al. 2005). In addition, it has to be presented in a way that it can be interpreted into different contexts. Just like Guinness has achieved; it has a strong core story based on its foundation and quality production process. However, the advertisements are telling a customised story according to the cultural framework of each market. Nevertheless, these stories are consistent with the essence of the Guinness as a corporate entity (Simmons, 2006).

Companies are using successful storytelling strategy to communicate its essence to different stakeholders. BergHind Joseph (2012), a design and communication agency, provided evidence of that in their report: “the power of storytelling”. In which 20 companies from the Fortune Global 500 were highlighted by their effective use of narrative online. These companies are using stories to build a corporate brand, a clear understanding of values and a view of working life and corporate culture.

What about Storytelling brand?

Companies, principally, talk to consumers through brands. They play an important role in costumers´ stories (Gabriel & Lang, 1995; Woodside, 2010). They can be animated and humanized (Fournier, 1998), giving them an specific personality that reflects the consumer’s preferences and lifestyle. This is what a storytelling brand can embody.

Storytelling brands communicate through a narration, which could be either real or fictional. It can transmit the meaning of the brand using metaphors to convey abstract messages into something people find familiar (Simmons, 2006; Salzer-Mörling & Strannegård, 2004). The story delimits the framework in which brands are embedded (Kozinets et al. 2010) and brings their values to life through powerful images and dynamic contexts, making them something applicable to daily life. “… a story puts those values into perspective and into a human context. Those values then make sense and
storytelling brands talk to consumers through symbolic and experiential components inside a narration, aiming to transmit meaning and identification to them (Padgett & Allen, 1997).

The process of understanding a story is an association between the narrative and the previous experiences stored in consumers’ memory (Shank and Abelson, 1995 cited in Escalas, 2004b), allowing an easy comprehension of the brand’s meaning and remembrance of the facts. Storytelling is able to persuade through narrative transportation, defined by Green and Brock (2000) as the process of immerse and get lost into a story. The immersion reduces the possibility of negative cognitive responses or critical thinking, produce more real experiences and strong affective reactions (Escalas, 2004a). Stories immerse consumers into the message of the brands, and create mental images of possible consumption moments (Escalas, 2004a); which most probably will lead to action (Guber, 2007).

Consumers can interpret the meaning of a brand fitting it into their own experiences, relating it with their own self. This process is known as the self-brand connection (Escalas, 2004b), which builds strong affective bonds between consumer and brands (Roberts, 2004; Thompson et al. 2006). Consumers choose to include brands into their own stories, where the brands contribute to satisfy psychological needs, like defining self-identity, achieving individuality and connecting with similar individuals (Escalas, 2004b). This facilitates the development of engagement. The meaningful, sustainable and emotionally based consumer-brand relationship (Gobe, 2002).

Papadatos (2006) developed a qualitative study to discover what was behind the success of an air miles reward program. She found that it was originated on consumers’ stories. They talked about what the reward program means to them: It is not about gaining the ticket; instead about where it brings them and how it is enjoyed with family or friends. They were telling their proper stories through the airline experience. It showed how the consumers got the meaning of the reward program and introduced it into their life’s stories.
Companies should not forget that the story must say the truth; they cannot pretend to be the good hero inside the story, and behind behave in a different way. This reflects inconsistencies that the consumers will not tolerate. Holt (2002) described the anti-branding movement, and how consumers are becoming more sceptical and critical in front of branding strategies. They have access to information to realize when a company is hiding its profit motive, when a brand promise is against corporate actions and when authenticity is not about the exposure of the real facts and actions of the company. “The anti-branding movement wants to reframe authenticity as a quality of the sponsor. The movement demands that, to be authentic, corporations must reveal their corporate bodies, warts and all, to public scrutiny” (Holt, 2002, p.86). Consumers are asking for transparency and they will engage with the brands that have consistency between the story and their actions.

Storytelling brands allow consumers to build personal experiences that suits with their dreams and needs (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003), creating bonds in which the consumer can build self-identify with the brand’s story. In this study, storytelling is the starting point of the brand experience, the consumer will feel and learn about the brand through its story. It could build bases of brand loyalty. Now, the brand experience concept will be described and related with the storytelling strategy.

**Brand Experience**

Brand experience is the framework in which storytelling can interact with consumers. The effects of the storytelling brand can be described through the dimensions of the experience. This section describes how the market has evolved to focus the attention on the consumer experience; and the concept will be defined. Later, its dimensions are illustrated. Two of the dimensions, which are closely related with the effects a storytelling brand may cause, the affective and the cognitive, are chosen to be related with emotional and cognitive loyalty.

**Product vs. experience**

Marketing definition has had an evolution of paradigms that shape the mind-set of marketers and consumers. Before, the attention was on the product dominant
paradigm, in which consumer’s satisfaction was determined by the features of a specific product. Companies design and manufacture products to satisfy specific needs and consumers become passive receivers; this can be described as a utilitarian consumption. Later on, the consumer got an active role in the creation of value and became a co-creator (building together with the company) of personalised experiences. Giving way to the service dominant paradigm, which pursuits the facilitation of interactive experiences and the satisfaction of personal desires through products or services (Anker et al. 2013). This evolution produces a hedonic consumption (that satisfies personal and internal needs).

Experience has become a major topic in marketing field, due to the new demands and expectations of consumers. Nowadays, it is not enough for companies to offer products or services through traditional advertising and wait for consumers to buy them; as Pine and Gilmore stated (1999 cited in Lim et al. 2011, p. 207): “We are in the middle of the revolution, a revolution that will render the principles and models of traditional marketing obsolete, a revolution that will replace traditional feature-and-benefit marketing with experiential marketing”. This perspective demands the facilitation by the company of frameworks and tools that enable the co-creation of consumers’ personalised experiences (Carù & Cova, 2003; 2008). Co-creation implies the participation of consumers in the contexts created by the company for the interaction and consumption process, to get the symbolic value that the company is promising.

**Consumer experience**

The notion of the consumer experience has been mentioned from mid-1980’s and it has been evolving to suit the dynamics between consumers and companies. From the beginning, brand experience was related with subjective significance after an interaction. It was focused on the consumption process, and authors were not taking into account any other possible stimuli that can occur before or after the consumption. The first one to mention the concept was Holbrook and Hirschman (1982); who described the experience as a personal occurrence due to the interaction with the service or product stimuli and usually it has an emotional significance. Later on, this sensory information can convey into perceptions (Carbone & Haeckel, 1994) and the
positive experiences have the possibility to engage individuals with the company (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

Later, the concept was no longer limited to the consumption action; it could include any touching point between brand and consumer. Like exchange of information online, advertisement on TV, recommendation from a friend, visit to the store, etc. (Brand, Lenz, & Robinette, 2002; Shaw & Ivens, 2002). Therefore, an interaction online with the website of Ben & Jerry’s is a brand experience, even if it does not involve any consumption action.

**Brand experience definition and effects**

Normally consumer experience has been centred in the products’ attributes and not in the experiences that a brand can provide through its own attributes. Such as colours, design, slogans, characters, packaging, marketing communications, story and identity. All these elements can produce intense subjective stimuli that constitute the brand experience; which is defined by Brakus et al. (2009) as:

“Subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand’s design and identity, packaging, communications and environments” (Brakus et al., 2009, p. 53).

The research evaluated the feelings and cognitions that the interaction with the storytelling brand created. The interaction was online, without a direct contact with the physical product, and the purpose was to analyse if participants were affected by Ben & Jerry’s story and the brand’s features shared on the website.

The effects of a brand experience can be analysed, according with Brakus et al. (2009) into four dimensions: **sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioural**. The sensory is related with the brand’s capability of appealing to the senses. When a brand evokes feelings and emotions, we can talk about the affective one. The intellectual refers to the stimulation of curiosity and problem solving, it means in which extend a brand makes people think and reflect about it; and finally the behavioural embodies the action itself, how motivational can be a brand’s stimuli to make consumers engage with actions.
towards the brand. The affective and intellectual dimensions were analysed in depth, immerse on the brand experience of the storytelling brand; evaluating if the online experience with a Ben & Jerry’s created emotions and understanding of the rational facts.

The brand experience is the first stage of the interaction between consumer and brand and it differs from other brand constructs such as: **attitudes** (beliefs or emotional reactions); **involvement** (interests that motivate a consumer towards an object); **brand attachment** (a strong emotional bond) or **brand personality** (tendency to endorse brands with human characteristics) (Aaker, 1997). The creation of attitudes, brand attachment and involvement could be an outcome of positive brand experiences, but they are not the experience itself. Brand personality is clearly developed into storytelling brands, and the findings will show this phenomenon among the participants.

In the academic field there is evidence of the positive effects that a storytelling brand experience produces on consumers. Lundqvist et al. (2013) provided empirical evidence that storytelling produced positive brand associations. They proved that a brand with the support of a corporate story could develop more positive brand attitudes and willingness to pay a higher price for the product; than the same brand without the context of a story. They showed that consumers created high-quality expectations and relationship with the brand values due to storytelling characteristics.

Iglesias et al. (2011) provided evidence on how positive brand experiences are connected with brand loyalty. They stated that positive brand experiences, which considers rational and emotional components and provide a consistency throughout all stimuli, evoke emotional responses. These emotional responses are closely attached to satisfaction and finally satisfaction leads to loyalty (Iglesias et al., 2011). They conveyed empirical evidence of a direct relation between brand experience and brand loyalty, mediated by affective commitment. This is precisely what this study would like to prove.

In this case, the brand experience is framed within storytelling strategy. Affective commitment could be develop if a brand provided a personalised experience that touch consumers’ emotions and stimulate their minds (Schmitt, 1999). And storytelling is able to achieve both reactions on consumers.
Also, it has been proved that “brand experience has a behavioural impact, it affects consumer satisfaction and loyalty directly and indirectly through brand personality associations” (Brakus et al. 2009, p. 65). Because, brand personality increases the preference of a brand, due to the personal connection with consumers; and this rises trust and brand loyalty (Fournier, 1998).

The research of Lundqvist et al. (2013) and Brakus et al. (2009) inspired this study, with the purpose of looking for empirical evidence of consumers’ effects to storytelling brands and how this experiences create a path for loyalty, as Gentile et al. (2007) expressed: the rational decision making has been leaving behind, and nowadays the intangible elements as emotions are determining true loyalty, and storytelling brands provide these elements. Now, the concept of loyalty will be described.

**Brand Loyalty**

Loyalty is the final concept and also the possible outcome of the brand experience with the storytelling brand. This section will explain the concept of brand loyalty, however as it is a vast topic inside marketing; this study will take one approach for the research: a tri-dimensional approach of loyalty.

**What has been defined as brand loyalty?**

Brand loyalty has been evolving from an utilitarian repurchase to a relationship concept between customer and the consumed item (Fournier, 1998). Inside a competitive market, where quality, functionality and fair prices are taken for granted, it becomes more important to determine which experiences are creating a long term customer loyalty (Mascarenhas et al. 2006).

The concept of loyalty has had an evolution, where the roots endure, but more aspects were taken into account with time. It started to be defined by Jacoby (1971) as a rational decision of repurchasing a product, despite having different choices or even paying more for it, because consumers perceive unique characteristics that other offers do not provide. This approach is only behavioural based and does not contemplate the connection a consumer may have with the brand. Bloemer and Kaspel (1995)
determined that true brand loyalty should consider the degree of commitment or attachment to a brand when it is repurchased and two different types of loyalty arise: behavioural loyalty and attitudinal loyalty (Chaudhuri & B. Holbrook, 2001; Dick & Basu, 1994). Behavioural correspond to the action of repurchasing, meanwhile, the attitudinal refers to the perceptions that the consumer has about a brand; it includes “a degree of dispositional commitment in terms of some unique value associated with the brand” (Chaudhuri & B. Holbrook, 2001, p.82), it means the predisposition of buying a brand because it provides satisfactory feelings.

Finally, Oliver’s definition summarize all these aspects: brand loyalty is “a deeply held commitment to rebuy or re-patronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour” (Oliver, 1999, p.34). It is based on the commitment of repeating buying, however this action has to have a background or reason to be. Here is where loyalty acquires different dimensions, Oliver (1999) also distinguished between behavioural loyalty and attitudinal loyalty, and divided the attitudinal in three different components: intentions, cognitions and affects.

**Tri dimensional approach of brand loyalty**

The tri-dimensional approach of Worthington et al. (2009) was used through the study. It presented a logical flow of the human behaviour towards a brand. They proposed that any human action implies at least one of three different responses: cognitive (I think), emotive (I feel) and behavioural (I do). Brand loyalty becomes consumer’s thoughts and feelings that raise a final action (Worthington et al. 2009). This approach constitutes an extension to Oliver’s (1999) concept of loyalty. The major difference is on the structure of attitudinal loyalty: for Oliver (1999) it includes intentions, cognitions and affects. Here the intentions are excluded, due to the lack of capability to predict the behavioural loyalty (Ajzen, 2001).

Attitudinal loyalty has two components: cognitive commitment, that implies the willingness of staying with a brand based on factual or rational information (Allen & Meyer, 1990). It constitutes a psychological preference based on positive beliefs and
thoughts about acquiring a brand (Russell-Bennett et al.2007). The second component is affective commitment, which is based on the emotional on-going relation with a brand and the positive feelings that the interactions or stimuli build (Worthington et al.2009). Finally, the behavioural loyalty, which is expressed in terms of purchase, conditioned to consumer satisfaction, and it is measured by historical sales (Mascarenhas et al.2006). The three dimensions are: emotional, cognitive and behavioural loyalty as the Figure 2 shows:

**Figure 2: A tri-dimensional approach to Brand loyalty**

![Diagram of Brand Loyalty](image)

Source: (Worthington et al.2009)

Even-though, sales and profits are the final purpose of every single business, and it is clearly reflected on behavioural loyalty; there is advantage on understanding and achieving cognitive and emotional loyalty. Because, the development of emotional bonds will create consumers for lifetime, passionate loyal that will talk about the brand, due to the inclusion of the brand on their own lives. This kind of relationships between brands and consumers are developed through positive and emotional engaging brand experiences (Mascarenhas et al.2006). The cognitive loyalty is achieved through the understanding of corporate identity and the brand’s features, and provides rational base for choosing a brand, among others.

To conclude, the literature review exposed the three principal topics of the study and connected them to show the logic of the research. It evaluated, with empirical evidence, the capacity of a storytelling brand (Ben & Jerry’s) of developing a ground floor for brand loyalty, through a specific brand experience online. The study demonstrated that brand loyalty is moving from a simple repurchasing action to a more
relational base concept. Now, the research procedures will be described in the methodology chapter.
Research Methodology

This chapter describes how the research was built and developed. It presents the background of Ben & Jerry’s. Then, the study’s purpose and objectives are developed. The method justifies why a qualitative research was chosen and how the inductive theory leads the analysis. The research design describes in detail how the data collection was realised and finally the data analysis refers to how the information was processed to reach the findings.

Ben & Jerry’s Background

Ben & Jerry’s was founded by two friends: Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield, they met at the seventh grade’s gym class, they found a common difficulty for sports. After 14 years, they learned how to do Ice-cream with a $5 dollar correspondence course and founded Ben & Jerry’s in Burlington, Vermont in 1978. They opened their first shop in a run-down gas station. The product is distinguished for the innovative names and flavours, with the big chunks of chocolate, fruit and nuts, what they called: “mouth feel” (Unilever UK Limited, 2008).

It is the story of music and sugar-loving hippies that founded a company to have fun, and in the process they wanted to contribute to save the world. It is a “buddy story”, that combines the personal values of the founders with corporate practices (Mathews&Wacker, 2008). They have showed that they pursuit more ideals for their company than profits. They have stated a strong philosophy of social corporate responsibility (Dennis et al. 1998). It is reflected into specific actions such as: the free-cone-day, the establishment of Ben & Jerry’s foundation, the “cowmobile” (distribution of free cones), the “1% for peace”, and so forth. Ben & Jerry’s contributes with a minimum of $1.1 million annually through corporate philanthropy (Unilever USA 2013).

The company divided its mission into three chapters:

Social Mission: “To operate the company in a way that actively recognizes the central role that business plays in society by initiating innovative ways to improve the quality of life locally, nationally, and internationally”
Product Mission: “To make, distribute, and sell the finest quality all natural ice-cream and euphoric concoctions with a continued commitment to incorporating wholesome, natural ingredients and promoting business practices that respect the earth and the environment.”

Economic Mission: “To operate the company on a sustainable financial basis of profitable growth, increasing value for our stakeholders, and expanding opportunities for development and career growth for our employees” (Unilever UK Limited, 2008)

Ben & Jerry’s shares its values through stories:

- Raw materials: the origin of the ingredients is described embedded into the fair-trade-certifications of all products.
- Employees: their personal stories are shared and how the company supports them to achieve their goals.
- Farmers: tell how the company supports them to work independently and to have enough time with their families.
- Animated Cows: get voice at the Ben & Jerry’s website and they talk about their pleasant life in the farms; they describe the production process and how the farmers treat them.
- Production process: shares through videos all the processes of ice-cream’s production.

In 2000 the company was acquired by the Anglo-Dutch Corporation: Unilever. The purpose was stated by Ben & Jerry’s as a unique agreement enabling it to join forces to create a more dynamic, socially positive ice-cream business with a much more global reach (Mathews & Wacker, 2008).

Unilever increased its total sales in 6,9%, in 2012, compare with a 6,5% in 2011. The total sales were €51,300 million and the free cash flow was €4,3 billion. The result was achieved mostly for the businesses on the developing markets. The number of employees in 172 million around the world (Unilever USA, 2013).
Ben & Jerry’s is a multinational with presence in several countries like Figure 3 shows, and its major direct competitors are Nestle and Haagen Dazs. Ben & Jerry’s kept an independent board of directors to protect and defend brand equity and integrity, product quality and employees’ working conditions (Unilever UK Limited, 2008).
**Research Aim**

**Storytelling brand: an experience that creates a path for brand loyalty?** This is the primary research question. As the red arrow in Figure 4 shows, the main aim is to discover if the brand experience that a storytelling brand provides, is able to build a pathway to reach brand loyalty. It may be built with the consequences or effects that come from the affective and intellectual dimensions of the online experience with Ben & Jerry’s; which, at the same time, lead to emotional and cognitive loyalty.

**Figure 4: Scheme of the research**

Taking this aim as the baseline for the study; there are 5 secondary objectives that will guide the findings of the research. The numbers on Figure 4 show the places they take inside the research scheme. The objectives are:

1. Describe the general impressions about the online experience with Ben & Jerry’s corporate website, taking into account the characteristics of the storytelling brand.
2. Evaluate the affective dimension of brand experience and determine how it creates bases for emotional loyalty.
3. Identify the consequences of the intellectual dimension and how they build foundations for cognitive loyalty.
4. Illustrate specific participant’s aims for actions that could evoke a future behavioural loyalty.

5. Determine how the online brand experience with Ben & Jerry’s could create a pathway to brand loyalty.

**Method**

Storytelling brand is a concept that has been developed vastly on the literature base, however the empirical evidence of the effects that it has on potential and actual consumers is reduced, as Lundqvist et al. (2013) suggested. Therefore, this qualitative research aimed to identify reactions and perceptions produced by an online experience framed into a storytelling brand. There is already empirical evidence that links positive brand experiences with the development of brand loyalty (Brakus et al.2009; Escalas,2004a). But there is no evidence on the specific case of a storytelling brand experience, therefore, this research evaluated if it develops a path for brand loyalty. The findings are important for organizations and marketers that are using or considering a story as a base for the communication with consumers.

The qualitative research method allowed the collection of detailed descriptions of the online experience with Ben & Jerry’s. Including opinions, perceptions, feelings and memories. It allowed the understanding of the context and was looking for the meaning of an specific experience (Bryman&Bell,2011). Pratt (2009) expressed: “Qualitative research is great for addressing “how” questions—rather than “how many”; for understanding the world from the perspective of those studied; and for examining and articulating processes”. For storytelling research, normally a qualitative approach is used (Lundqvist et al.2013; Papadatos,2006), however for the study of brand experience the quantitative method predominate (Iglesias et al.2011; Brakus et al.2009). In this study, the qualitative approach facilitated major understanding of the participants’ reactions.

The primary data was collected through personal semi-structured interviews (Bryman&Bell,2011). They provided flexibility and interaction between researcher and interviewee. They had a guide of open-ended questions to follow, but there can be
coming up questions according with the flow of the conversation and participants´ reactions. There was a special interest on the participants´ points of view, and this technique allowed inquiring in depth about them.

The collected data was analysed within an inductive process, in which the purpose is to infer implications and make evaluations inside the existing theory. The inductive strategy serves the purpose of creating new theory (Bryman&Bell, 2011). Here theory is an outcome of research, not the starting point, and data are collected to build theory rather than to test it. However this is not a rule, sometimes the qualitative research do not build theory. This study is one of these cases, the existing theory was evaluated.

**Research Design**

The research did not aim to focus on one single industry or type of organization, but it was necessary to take one real company that could provide the brand experience based on a storytelling. The selected company was Ben & Jerry’s. It was chosen, because it talks to consumers through narratives about every aspect of the organization: products, processes, stakeholders and values. Additionally; it uses interactive tools like videos, timelines and graphic designs that enable fluent and entertaining interaction with the website. It is from United Kingdom (Unilever UK Limited, 2008) as the research was developed in this country.

The online brand experience had specific instructions on which were the links to be visited, the information to be read and the videos to be watched on the website. These instructions were shared with the participants by e-mail on a power point presentation (Appendix 1: Instructions for Brand Experience)
Storytelling brand: an experience that creates a path for brand loyalty?
It was done with the purpose of keeping consistency on the information that all participants got before the interview. The topics covered were:

- **Corporate Story**: the meaning of the brand and the four principal parts of a corporate story could be identified on the company history. The **characters** are the founders; they took the role of heroes. They pursue the goal of delivering the promise of a quality, funny and delicious ice-cream and save the world at the same time. The **conflict** is based on the difficulties they confronted to build a successful company and the daily problems in society they want to help to solve. The **plot** is developed through the different events of the company’s trajectory, which are in more detail into the time-line. And, the **message** is that Ben & Jerry’s follows the founders’ philosophy. They are the driving force of the story, they want to deliver a high quality and fun ice-cream and make the world a better place at the same time. This talks about social corporate responsibility, sustainability and deep meaning of existence of the organization.

- **Company timeline**: It familiarizes the participants with the growth process of the company and actions it has been involve following their philosophy of making the world a better place.

- **Mission statements**: to identify social responsibility compromises and which values the company stands for.

- **Production process**: to see how the company shows all the production process and also to learn about the essence of quality.

- **Animated cows and farmers’ videos**: to identify how the company relate with its suppliers and the raw material acquisition.

- **Fair-trade certifications**: to appreciate how the company behaves towards the environment and the producers of the ingredients of the ice-cream.

Apart from the specific content, the purpose was that participants identify products’ features, people behind the ice-cream, corporate atmosphere and the essence of the brand. The recommended browsing was designed to take maximum 20 minutes, but
participants had the freedom to interact with the website as much time as they wanted. After the experience, each participant met with the researcher for the personal interview, which was voice–recorded.

The main purpose of the interviews was to collect perceptions, thoughts, feelings or ideas regarding the personal experience with open-ended questions. These questions were elaborated by the researcher who was inspired on two journals that made studies looking for similar research aims: *The impact of Storytelling on consumer brand experience: The case of a firm originated story* (Lundqvist et al.2013) and *Brand experience: what is it? How is it measured? Does it affect loyalty?* (Brakus et al.2009).

The interviews took between 30-40 minutes, according with participants’ willingness to share. It started with some demographic aspects. The introduction questions got information about participant consumption of ice-cream, perception of the brand experience, detected brand’s characteristics and corporate values. Also, the participants were asked to paraphrase the story of the company, which evaluated the remembrance and understanding. Then, it went deeper into participants’ emotions, personal connections and opinions about Ben & Jerry’s story and communication strategy. The trust and affinity of participants with the organization was evaluated, asking if they believed what the company is telling and if they would like to work in Ben & Jerry’s. To conclude, the researcher inquired if they would buy the product and if they were willing to pay a higher price for the ice-cream, comparing with the competence. There was a space for additional comments and thoughts.

**Sample**

The sample was random according with the researcher’s convenience, due to the restriction of time and the non-rewarded participation. There was a goal of 15 interviews and it was accomplished. The participants were young adults between 24 to 31 years old, 11 women and 4 men. They were all professionals, some of them working or looking for a job and others studying postgraduate programs. Their nationalities were diverse and some were living in UK and others in Colombia. This diversity allowed the
comparison between participants that did not know about the company, 6 of them, and the others that had had previous contact with the products or the brand.

Even-though, the participants were chosen by convenience, there was an effort to look for people that did not know about the company and the products, because it allowed a complete new experience. In the cases of the participants that had any previous interaction with the brand or product, it was still the first time browsing the corporate website. Additionally, none of them were constant or loyal consumers of Ben & Jerry’s ice-cream. This pursuit the novelty of the brand experience online, to capture the first impressions and perceptions of the interaction.

**Data analysis**

The data analysis was based on grounded theory. This is a descriptive or exploratory approach that emphasizes in the understanding of social processes and normally is organized around key categories or themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It is defined as a “theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analysed through the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis, and eventual theory stand in close relationship with one another” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998 cited in Bryman & Bell, 2011). Two main characteristics could be identified: the development of theory out of data and an iterative approach; which means that during the process the researcher is going from data to theory and vice versa. This method is largely used in the United States since 1965, when Glaser and Strauss created it (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The grounded theory was appropriate, because it explores the complexity of meanings, and tries to reflect the participants’ vision of the world. The scope of this study did not allow the emergence of new theory. But, it formed a compendium of themes from data, and related them with the aim of research. This reduced version of this approach constitutes a grounded theory-lite, proposed by Pidgeon and Henwood (1997). It proposed to complete the first stages of the grounded theory analysis: initial coding and concept development. It is normally used in smaller research projects. The complete stages are: theoretical sampling, coding, theoretical saturation, constant comparison, writing memos and explore relations between categories (Bryman & Bell, 2011).
The analysis began with the data familiarization. The researcher listened to the interview recordings, to remember and find relevant information for the aim of the research. Then the coding process started with the reduction of information, choosing the parts of data that have relation with the study, this is known as the selective coding. After, there was a process of categorization, in which the records became more organized and began to get labels, this constitutes the complete coding (Braun & Clarke, 2013), and allow the creation of categories. Inside this coding process, the researcher wrote some memos that were small pieces of analytic ideas that were evolving within the investigation; they constituted the draft for the findings writing, this helped to have fresh ideas that came up during the analysis and later on could be complemented.

After the coding process, the identification of patterns was done. This is the method of going through the data compilation and take the meaningful social or psychological phenomenon that are related with the research aim, it was about finding the elements to answer the research question. Here the frequency or repetition of answers was relevant. With the coding, the ideas were created, and the themes assembled the concepts that finally gave shape to the findings.

The themes were included into the research objectives, and they were supported with literal comments of the participants that show empirical evidence of how each objective was achieved. Now the next chapter will illustrate how the principal research question was answered.
Findings

**Storytelling brand: an experience that creates a path for brand loyalty?** The answer is yes. According with the empirical evidence collected, a storytelling brand is able to set foundations for brand loyalty, through a brand experience: Specifically an online experience with Ben & Jerry’s. The findings illustrate how there are affective and intellectual effects that lead to emotional and cognitive loyalty; and which are the participants’ aims that could evoke in the future behavioural loyalty. This section is divided according with the research objectives.

1. **Experience with Ben & Jerry’s**

   Figure 5: Objective 1

   ![STORYTELLING BRAND](image)

   **Source:** Author

   The website design and the structure got likes and dislikes; however the brand experience had positive outcomes. Figure 6 has some impressions and the characteristics associated with the website itself. In general the interaction with the site was found interesting, funny, original and friendly. Most of the participants enjoyed the animated cow, the colourful design and the authentic videos. They described an entertained and family oriented atmosphere; a rather childish appearance with serious information and an innovative environment that make them want to stay longer and explore more. Nevertheless, there were 3 disappointed participants with the amount of information the website contains and the difficulty to browse the specific information they were looking for.
All participants identified the storytelling essence of the brand. They realised that the purpose of the website was to tell openly the complete story about the company’s trajectory, values, goals, production chain, employees, etc. Therefore, the company became an effective storyteller. Because, it shows the intention of been transparent and honest (Guber, 2007; Salzer-Mörling & Strannegård, 2004). Then, the story makes sense to different audiences and stakeholders. Like the farmers and employees talk about the company values and processes, due to the strong roots of an authentic story (Mathews & Wacker, 2008).

Different narrative strategies (Figure 7) were identified: the animated cows were telling about the good treatment they are getting in the production process, the employees are sharing their own life experiences and how the company is supporting them, the farmers are talking about their businesses conditions and the company is telling its purpose and history. As Simmons (2006) stated, the company is using metaphors and fictional environments to convey difficult messages into something that is familiar to the audience, such is the case of the animated cows “telling” about their daily life.
All participants identified and paraphrase the four elements of the core story (Fog et al. 2005): the principal characters were the two founders Ben and Jerry, good friends that met in high school during the sport class and had in common the love for food and created an ice-cream company to have fun and try to save the world. The conflict were all the difficulties they had to confront at the beginning, such as the scarcity of money, the lack of knowledge about accounting, the sale of ice-cream during winter, among other issues. The plot was coherent and had an evolution sense, because the company grew gradually and keeping the philosophy of the founders: They wanted a company were they could have fun and that was contributing to the society, doing things good. This is the principal message of the story and all participants got it.
As the comments on Figure 8 show, all participants agreed that Ben & Jerry’s is providing a hedonic experience. They determined that ice-cream is not only food; it provides satisfaction due to the experience it can build, such as the spaces of joy and entertainment. The changing of mood because you are eating it, the excuse to share some special moments with your friends or family, the escape from the hectic routine, the remembrance of childhood, etc. As Anker et al. (2013) stated; nowadays companies are facilitating personalised experiences and the satisfaction of desires through products. Some participants even determined that in the food industry, people are no longer talking about quality or taste, because these characteristics are taken for granted, now they are looking for personalised experiences, like Carú and Cova proposed (2003, 2008).

2. Affective dimension to emotional loyalty

The brand experience developed emotions and personal identifications that are building a positive brand-consumer relationship. The online interaction was able to create an affective commitment towards the brand of 13 participants. It can be interpreted as a way for emotional loyalty. Four principal effects from the affective dimension were identified as the base of the emotional loyalty:

- Emotions

Each participant felt the experience framed into their personality, vision of life and consumption patterns; for that reason different kind of emotions were sensed with the
exactly same experience (Figure 10). A different perspective could be identified from 9 participants that had previous relation with the brand and the 6 that did not. People having their first touching point with Ben & Jerry’s expressed more rational thinking, and the emotions were attached to the connections they made, for example, they expressed familiarity, comfort, security, excitement and motivation.

For the 9 participants that already had experiences with the brand or product, the emotions were like a continuity of the whole brand experience. They felt: connection, satisfaction, fun, involvement, joy, tranquillity, inspiration, and motivation. They expressed satisfaction to have more knowledge of a product that they already liked, tranquillity to know that they are buying from a company that has corporate social responsibility and fair-trade certification, inspiration from the founders and joy to see the animated cows talking.

Trust on the company

14 participants expressed that they trust on the information they saw on the website, and the transparency of the company was appreciated. However, there was scepticism because Ben & Jerry’s now is part of Unilever, and it has become a multinational. But participants claimed that the website gave the sensation the company is still small, then this make them wondering about the veracity of the information. Nevertheless, only one participant assures that the company was lying, and the 14 supported their trust in information from the same website (Figure 11).
Brand Personality

“This Company is selling a lifestyle: people think they are doing something good when they buy the ice-cream”, one of the participants stated. And it is correct, a storytelling brand like Ben & Jerry’s wants to be part of consumers’ life and provide them with tools to define their own personality, as Escalas (2004a) and Gobe (2002) specified. People identify with Ben & Jerry’s if they consider themselves funny, creative, innovative, environmental friendly or generous. Participants knew they were talking about an ice-cream, but they did not referred to it as a simple commodity, they spoke about an experience, a space created to share and specific values that define their own personality. The concept of brand personality could be identified and how successfully the participants endorse human characteristics to the brand (Aaker, 1997).
9 of 15 participants consider themselves reflected into the personality of the company, 7 of them had previous contact with the product or the brand and 2 of them were experiencing the brand for first time. They found identification into different spheres of the brand: the persistence of the founders, the detailed and colourful design, the values or the consumption experience (Figure 12). The different perspectives in which each participant identified with the brand, shows how they got immerse into the story according with their individuality and lifestyle. Because consumers are the ones opening spaces for brands on their life´s stories (Fournier, 1998), they are constructing the experiences with a context that an ice-cream company provides to them.

- **Work at Ben & Jerry´s**

“I will work in a company like B&J because it is flexible, non-hierarchical, take care of the employees and gives them spaces to be creative”, this was one participant’s statement and expressed in different ways, all participants stated that they will like to work in Ben & Jerry´s. This fact is showing how the experience created connection and acceptance in high extend. Even-though there were some negative experiences with the website or disappointment with the ownership of Unilever, it produced willingness to belong to the company.
3. **Intellectual dimension to cognitive loyalty**

The experience with Ben & Jerry’s provided an understanding of the important facts about the company and the brand, and a connection of them with personal memories. These effects created positive beliefs and thoughts regarding the brand (Russell-Bennett et al. 2007), which will probably encourage the preference of the brand and created a solid path for cognitive loyalty. This statement is supported with the following evidence:

- **Connection with personal memories**

Participants related the company’s story with personal experiences (Figure 14). This is the process of immersion into the story: narrative transportation, described by Escalas (2004a). Each person relates the narrative with their own memories or experiences. For the 9 participants with knowledge of the brand, the memories were close to the previous touching points with the brand.
For the 6 participants having a new experience, the connections were made with memories like happy moments in childhood or with other ice-cream brands. These associations also reinforce the affective commitment.

- **Understanding of brand Meaning and values**

The story of Ben & Jerry’s has a dynamic context within the online platform. The interactive tools and the use of powerful images such as animated cows, make easy to transmit the meaning of the brand. As Fog et al. (2005) stated, if a company uses these tools, then values and meanings become tangible concepts and applicable to daily life. This was the effect that all participants reflected. They identified the values of the company and connected them with normal events on life and 9 of them identified themselves with them. They described the framework in which the brand is embedded sharing the specific characteristics of it. Figure 15 shows the list of the values that were identified and the number of times they were mentioned and the characteristics of the brand.
It is important to highlight the responsibility, generosity and caring as the most mentioned values, this framed into the fair-trade certification, and the care that the company has for different stakeholders. Besides, the demonstrations of generosity such as donations and the “free cone day”. In the meaning of the brand, all participants talk about funny and innovative, due to its constant creativity, differentiation of the ingredients and its original personality.

- Remembrance of Story

The remembrance of the story is reinforced by the narrative transportation (Escalas, 2004a); the emotions that were evoked by the experience; the proper features of a story (chronology and causality); and the message with moral valuation (Fog et al. 2005).
All participants were involved by the company’s history and paraphrased the story. Starting with the founders, talking about their friendship, how they meet in high school during the sport class; their love for food and how they started the business with a course that cost $5 dollars. This is the power that an authentic and emotive story has; even if they do not become loyal consumers of Ben & Jerry’s, they will talk about this story. Then, each participant focuses on the facts or emotions that approach their own preferences, as the Source: Author. Figure 16 shows; some will remember the entrepreneurship spirit, others the creative names and designs of the brand physical features, the Colombians will recall the good practices with farmers and animals, in the other side the Europeans will remember the fair trade certification.

- **Word of Mouth**

The online experience with Ben & Jerry’s showed that a consumer-brand relationship based on trust and emotional connection will develop willingness for action, not only the purchase of the product but other actions that also promote the brand and develop long term commitment (Figure 17). First, there were three participants that are becoming ambassadors of the brand (Guber, 2007; Fog et al. 2005). They will recommend the brand to other people and encourage them to try it. This is showing truly engagement and trust to the brand. Even-though, 13 participants won’t talk by their own initiative about the brand to other people; they assured that if the topic
comes to the table, they will mention Ben & Jerry’s and will refer to it as an example of corporate social responsibility, fair-trade and an interesting yet fun experience.

Figure 17: Willingness for action

![Image](image1.png)

Source: Author

4. Willingness for action and behavioural loyalty

Figure 18: Objective 4

![Image](image2.png)

Source: Author

The findings are coming to the topic that interests most the managers: are they going to buy? The answer is yes. All participants assured that they will buy the product. The actual consumers will try new flavours and the participants experiencing the brand for first time would like to try it. Even 9 of the 15 participants are willing to pay a higher price for Ben & Jerry’s Ice-cream, compare with the competence. One reason for this positive outcome can be explain by Escalas (2004a), when he expressed that stories immerse consumers into the message of the brands, and are created mental images of possible consumption moments.
The research cannot assure that participants will buy the product, but they showed a strong intention to do it, which constructs a possibility for behavioural loyalty.

5. **A path for loyalty**

The findings are not able to assure that the participants will become loyal to the brand, because there is not enough evidence. However, the findings above showed how the bases for **emotional loyalty** were developed due to the affective bonds built between participants and the brand, and the positive feelings they had during the stimuli (Worthington et al., 2009). The **cognitive loyalty** got bases with the understanding of rational facts (Allen & Meyer, 1990) and a development of nice thoughts; which provided the participants with reasons to believe in the brand and to encourage actions towards the company. Consequently, **behavioural loyalty** got an aim of purchasing the product, but it is not enough to determine the emergence of this type of loyalty.

The tri-dimensional approach stated, the consumers “think, feel and then do” (Worthington et al., 2009). Applying this theory to the study’s findings: participants think about the brand because they remember it due to its connection with personal memories; they have positive feelings about previous experiences and feel connected to the brand’s values and they showed willingness to buying Ben & Jerry's ice-cream. Therefore, the storytelling brand created a path for **Brand loyalty**. It built solid bases for the relationship between consumer and brand.
Evaluating each participant experience, we can conclude that 13 participants have a high probability to develop emotional and cognitive loyalty (according with the researcher analysis). They felt and knew the company’s story in a different way and the principal outcomes of the experiences were different, according with their personalities (Appendix 3). These can be interpreted as the personal relation that they developed with the brand.

To conclude, the empirical evidence supports that the aim of the research was reached, because, it is possible to find a path for brand loyalty through the brand experience of a storytelling brand like Ben & Jerry’s.
Conclusions

The research provided empirical evidence to show the power of a storytelling brand into the creation of solid bases for brand loyalty. A brand like Ben & Jerry’s evoked emotions, produced positive thoughts and encouraged clear buying intentions after the interaction with its brand’s story. The findings supported the theory that was exposed on the literature review. And with evidence gathered from participants’ online experience the research exposed the effects that a storytelling brand can create on consumers.

One aim was to show how the concept of loyalty is evolving, from the act of repurchasing to a relational concept; and it was achieved. Because, taking into account the tri-dimensional approach of loyalty (Worthington et al. 2009). Participants built a ground floor for emotional and cognitive loyalty, due to the effects that an experience with storytelling brand developed. A relationship between a brand and a potential or actual consumer was shaped, and it encourages intentions of actions, one is purchasing, in accordance with behavioural loyalty. But there were more actions motivated with the experience such as: become ambassadors of the brand and encourage consumption of others; the willingness of sharing the corporate story if a related topic with brand values and meaning comes up; and the positive attitude in front of the idea of working for a company like Ben & Jerry’s.

These are consequences of a relationship based on trust and affective bonds developed between the brand and the participants. This is what a storytelling brand facilitates to develop to settle the bases for long lasting loyal consumers. Therefore, storytelling brand can be an appropriate communication strategy when an organization would like to build consumer-brand relationships. Not in vain Guber (2007) stated that storytelling is one of the most powerful tools to achieve results, due its orientation to action.

The findings are just a small sign of the revolution that the consumption patterns are confronting. As Schmitt (1999) suggested: the success on the marketplace will depend on the companies’ capacity to deliver desirable consumer experiences. Nowadays consumers want stories that touch their hearths, which make them think further and
allow them to define themselves. Nevertheless, companies have to be careful about the stories they tell consumers, because if they are not authentic or do not show consistency between what they do and what they say, they can get awful results.

Storytelling is not about telling an emotive and well-structured narrative, that convinces consumers through magical contexts and fairy-tale characters. Instead, it is about telling the truth to consumers and show how the company pursues deeper objectives than just profits. The pretty facet of the story facilitates the communication, but the revolution that companies are facing, is about personal experiences of consumers that care about the products and services they are consuming. They want to know the complete background of production, employees’ working conditions and behaviours towards the society and environment. Because, they would like to feel they are consuming from a company that is doing things properly, according with their values.

The research showed that most of the participants identified themselves with the brand, however it was assumed from different perspectives, from the values, the brand characteristics, the entrepreneurship spirit, etc. This proved that a unique story will approach the audience that is alike this features and has a lifestyle that suits with the personality of the brand. The time for overcrowding in marketing is over; there is the time of personalised experiences and creation of strong emotional bonds. The time for loyalty based on consumer-brand relationship is a reality.

To conclude, it is possible for a company to create a path to reach brand loyalty telling its story. Definitely a company that open itself to the consumer and try to construct a relationship based on mutual trust may have a long term loyal consumer.
Managerial Implications

General implications for organizations and marketers

Some participants expressed admiration for the generosity and caring spirit that Ben & Jerry’s is showing through different specific actions, they are giving something back to the society. It is a reality that not all companies can give in the same extends, and that they exist and sustain themselves due to profits. However, if the organizations do not have a more profound essence than money, then their brands won’t provide an emotive and memorable experience to stakeholders (Fog et al.2005).

Companies will have to be transparent and tell their real story to the consumers, employees and stakeholders, to create solid foundations for relationships. This implies that companies will need to do things correctly and stand for values that define the brand and corporate personality, which will need to be consistent in all the interactions with consumers. As Holt (2002) explained, consumers are getting information regarding companies behaviour, and they will connect only with companies that contribute to society.

Now the competitive advantage relies on the consumer experience, the traditional elements of marketing are behind; companies will compete to offer the best context and tools to enable consumers to construct personalised experiences and construct their identities embedded in brands and their stories. Companies will need to make an effort to communicate in an emotive way that touches the hearts of consumers to create emotional commitment that will become loyalty (Iglesias et al.2011).

Branding may become the core activity of the organizations. Because it can provide identity and meaning not only to the brand, but to the entire company. The construction of a solid brand that promotes the corporate identity inside and outside the organization is the way to construct a consistent image that can create trust. As Klein (1999, p.,22) expressed: "the branding project has moved beyond ‘splashing one’s logo on a billboard’, and instead branding has become an issue of fostering powerful identities and concepts".
Implications for Ben & Jerry’s

The company should be careful about how the story is having consistency outside the organization, because there is space for critics, like the journal from Dennis et al. (1998) that exposed a depth analysis of the true facts of the corporate social responsibility actions from the company.

During the interviews, some recommendations for Ben & Jerry’s were expressed spontaneously, and then it is important to mention them:

- The website should be more experiential to catch the attention from the consumers, and not full of facts for a researcher.
- The corporate story should be shared in different spaces apart from the website, additional it was the website should be more promoted to let consumer know about this information.
- Segmentation of targets for the website and create different spaces according with the public.

The Future of Storytelling

Latitud, a consultancy company, conducted an investigation focusing in the future of storytelling with in-depth interviews, to discover the possibilities for interaction with stories. The results showed an interest challenge for the companies using storytelling as a communication strategy. Because, consumers are becoming demanding and they are asking for major Integration, Impact, Immersion and Interactivity, Figure 20 (Latitude, 2012).

Consumers want to get major immersion and interaction into the stories; to move to the sensitive dimension on storytelling experience. From now on, the reality will become a platform for interaction with stories, like parallel worlds, facilitated by the mobile devices. People would like to have smarter content on them, to interact with 3D environments and become characters inside the story and help with the narrative. They want to co-create the story of the brands, and provide ideas to the companies.
The study stated the potential of storytelling brands. Audiences are waiting for marketers to come with something fresh and inventive (Latitude 2013). People agreed that brands can take features from the entertained narratives to convert them into stories or games. They are willing to engage with storytelling brands. Now the challenge of how marketers have to create and communicate the stories has been settled by consumers.
Limitations and future research

The research scope and time was limited, therefore the findings are useful as an example, but they cannot be generalized. Further research is recommended to determine how a storytelling brand is reaching loyalty. Besides, this study centred the attention in two dimensions of the brand experience with Ben & Jerry’s stories online. It can be interesting to investigate the whole brand experience and determine how the stories from the company move consumers to engage and be loyal to the brand. Additionally, the participation from the company could be enriching when compare the findings with the corporate view.

This study was focusing on the food industry, specifically Ice-cream. It is worthy to research about the effects of storytelling brands in other type of industries, specially the service industries and business to business companies, and compare the communication strategy effectiveness.

Storytelling brands is a concept with huge potential, and the theoretical bases are done, what has to be researched is how these brands are affecting consumers and the market in general. As the study from Latitude (2012;2013) showed, consumers are going ahead with their expectations regarding interaction and immersion into the stories. Marketers have to investigate further this topic before creating their communication strategy with a story.
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Appendix 1: Instructions for Brand Experience

Brand Experience with Ben & Jerry’s

Thank you for taking part of my research.
Now you will have an online brand experience and later you will tell me about it.

I kindly ask you to follow the required steps describe here.
Later, you have the freedom to explore all the web site and decide which is your favourite flavour.
Please go to the company web site and follow the indications below.

Ben and Jerry’s

Timeline...

Company’s Mission

Please take a moment to read the Mission of the company.
Go to OUR VALUES and select on the left hand side Mission statement.

About the Production of Ice cream

About Cows and farmers

Fairtrade

Thank you!
Appendix 2: Interviews questions

**Demographic questions:**

- Age:
- Gender:
- Occupation:

**Introductory questions**

1. Do you consume ice-cream? How often?
   - This specific brand?

2. After your interaction with the brand, how will you describe your experience?
   - Was the experience positive or negative? And why?

3. Can you tell me the story of the company and the brand in your own words? Did you learn something new?

4. Which is the meaning or promise of this story?

5. Describe the brand? Use at least 3 adjectives

6. Did you detect any moral values that the company follow? Do you identify yourself with any of these values?

**Personal and emotional questions**

7. Which memories from your life came into your mind meanwhile you were browsing the website?
   - Can you relate the story with any previous experience in your life?

8. Was the experience able to produce any emotion on you?
   - Why do you think this experience can create emotions?

9. Is this product or company reflecting any aspect of your personality or personal preferences?

*Storytelling brand: an experience that creates a path for brand loyalty?*
10. Did you imagine yourself eating the Ice-cream?

11. Do you think this product only satisfies a utilitarian or basic need or can it fulfil psychological or self-personal needs?

12. Do you feel that the company is saying the truth about its organizational and brand story? Would you trust it?

13. Would you like to be part of a company like Ben & Jerry’s? Why?

14. After some days, will you remember the story of the company and the brand?

- Would you share the company or brand story with someone else? With who will you shared and why?
- Do you consider that the way they are communicating is effective?
- Is it similar to other communications you have seen in the same industry?

**Conclusive or closing questions**

15. Would you like to buy the product? Why?

- Would you pay a higher price compared with other ice-cream companies?
- Do you feel that this company could satisfy you? How will it be?
- Did you choose your favourite flavour?

16. Any additional thinking or reflection about the activity?

- Something to add before we end the session?
### Appendix 3: Principal outcomes of the online Brand experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>First Experience with the Brand</th>
<th>Will Pay Higher Price?</th>
<th>Frequency in Ice Cream Consumption*</th>
<th>Identification with the Brand</th>
<th>Willingness for Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1   | 24 NO                           | YES                    | CONSTANT                            | YES                           | Ambassador of the brand.  
Try new flavours. |
| 2   | 25 NO                           | NO                     | RARELY                              | YES                           | Ambassador of the brand.  
Try new flavours. |
| 3   | 29 YES                          | NO                     | RARELY                              | NO                            | Try the product.  
Share the facts of the company. |
| 4   | 30 NO                           | NO                     | SEASONAL                            | RARELY                        | Continue buying the product.  
Share the good experience and facts of the product. |
| 5   | 26 NO                           | NO                     | SEASONAL                            | FREQUENT                      | Try new flavours.  
Share the good experience and facts of the product. |
| 6   | 25 YES                          | NO                     | RARELY                              | NO                            | Share the facts of the company. |
| 7   | 26 NO                           | YES                    | CONSTANT                            | NO                            | Try new flavours.  
Share the good experience and facts of the product. |
| 8   | 29 YES                          | YES                    | CONSTANT                            | YES                           | Try the product.  
Consider the idea of implementing the good production practices in Colombia.  
Share the good experience and facts of the product. |
| 9   | 31 YES                          | YES                    | RARELY                              | NO                            | Try the product.  
Consider the idea of implementing the good production practices in Colombia.  
Share the good experience and facts of the product. |
| 10  | 29 YES                          | YES                    | CONSTANT                            | YES                           | Try the product.  
Share the good experience and facts of the product. |
| 11  | 24 NO                           | YES                    | CONSTANT                            | NO                            | Ambassador of the brand.  
Try new flavours. |
| 12  | 24 NO                           | YES                    | SEASONAL                            | FREQUENT                      | Try new flavours.  
Share the good experience and facts of the product. |
| 13  | 27 YES                          | NO                     | RARELY                              | NO                            | Try the product.  
Share the good experience and facts of the product. |
| 14  | 30 NO                           | YES                    | CONSTANT                            | YES                           | Try new flavours.  
Share the good experience and facts of the product. |
| 15  | 29 NO                           | YES                    | CONSTANT                            | YES                           | Try new flavours.  
Share the good experience and facts of the product. |

*CONSTANT: Once a week  
SEASONAL FREQUENT: Once a week on summer  
SEASONAL RARELY: Once a month on summer  
RARELY: Some times during the year

Source: Author
## Storytelling brand: an experience that creates a path for brand loyalty?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Outcome of the Experience</th>
<th>Possibility of Emotional Loyalty</th>
<th>Possibility of Cognitive Loyalty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actual consumer who wants to continue buying and encourage others to try the product</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A person that rarely consume ice cream is willing to try different flavours of the brand, and recommend it to others</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad experience with the website, however he/she was receptive to the rational information of the company</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her personal view of the company changed for good with the experience.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual consumer with critical thinking, but still including the brand into life story.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Really disappointed with the acquisition of Unilever, it changed his experience</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very rational thinking and resistance to accept identification with the product, but the actions and perceptions show connection with the brand.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment to the brand and company with only online experience, identification of own personality</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very rational thinking, but engage with the experience.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convinced by the transparency of the company, she/he really wants the product in Colombia.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fan of the product, but he/she does not identify himself with the brand.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The brand is her/his top of mind for quality and it was reinforced with the experience.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She/he got into the experience and went further, even though she/he rarely eats ice cream.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total identification with the brand, but not willing to pay more</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totally identify with the story of the entrepreneurship</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>