

# **INVESTIGATING MARKETING EFFECTS OF ANCIENT STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES**

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**COULD ANCIENT STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES IN MARKETING  
COMMUNICATIONS BE THE HOLY GRAIL OF MARKETING NEEDED IN THESE  
TIMES OF FAILURE?**

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**Investigating marketing effects of ancient storytelling techniques:** Could ancient storytelling techniques in marketing communications be the Holy Grail of marketing needed in these times of failure?

Abstract:

The landscape of marketing is growing in competitiveness (*Digital ad spend worldwide 2026*. 2022), and marketers are consequently compelled to explore new ways to stand out and make their voices heard. Perhaps, the most efficient marketing communications are those that revisit the ancient roots of narrative theory and utilize traditional storytelling techniques not typically found in marketing. Stories are formatted in such a way that makes them easy to understand, and they tend to emotionally impact lives (Cutting, 2016), and marketing shares these common purposes. The logic of a theory of using storytelling in marketing, presented by Donald Miller in the book “Building a StoryBrand” (2017), will be examined by reviewing relevant literature associated with this conceptual framework.

Furthermore, this study will critically review the narrative elements presented by Miller (2017) by comparing them against the more traditional elements presented in the same theory. Respondents were surveyed to assess whether the unconventional narrative elements of Miller’s (2017) elements independently could lead to higher purchase intention, ad interest, ad memorability, brand distinctiveness, and lower levels of cognitive resource demands when used in a toothpaste advertisement. The results showed that storytelling did not affect the measures in the expected ways. However, some logic behind the failed results may have been found - low-involvement and functional products might not benefit from using storytelling techniques, while a general conclusion across industries cannot be made without future research.

Keywords:

Marketing Communications, Psychology in marketing, Storytelling in marketing, Building a StoryBrand, Donald Miller

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Yours Sincerely,  
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## Definitions

- **Call To Action:** In storytelling, a specific point toward the end of the story where the protagonist is thrown into action is called a *call to action*.
- **Film Style:** Filmmakers typically change the mood and the feel of the movie by changing the *film style*. This may include editing, motion, sound, and framing.
- **Archetype Myths:** *Archetypes* are unconscious primary forms in the human mind that are not learned or acquired. *Myths* are stories about heroes or supernatural beings that often explain the origins of natural phenomena or aspects of human behavior.
- **Proper Pleasure:** Aristotle believed that enacting powerful archetypal myths will result in *proper pleasure*, an unconscious positive emotional peak that can be re-experienced by retelling a story.
- **External Problems:** In storytelling, *external problems* are given by the environment and prevent the protagonist from reaching their goals.
- **Internal Problems:** In storytelling, *internal problems* are coming from inside the protagonist's mind and prevent them from reaching their goals.
- **Philosophical Problems:** In storytelling, *philosophical problems* represent a reality of how we believe the world should be, and when a story ends, it may present the moral of the story by depicting the world in such ways.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. The Current Marketing Environment

Sometimes, you learn more from failure than you do from success. Today, many marketers are faced with substantial challenges and failure may be the inevitable result for some. The current marketing environment is highly competitive, and the industry has during recent history moved from more traditional, analog forms, to digital formats, predominantly online on social media platforms. The digital marketing industry is continuously growing, with worldwide digital advertising spending amounting to US\$521 billion during the year 2021, with a projected growth to approximately US\$876 billion for the year 2026 (*Digital ad spend worldwide 2026*. 2022).

Since the market is growing, so is the competition. Marketers and businesses are forced to find new ways to stand out in the increasingly saturated world of market communications where not only awareness and visibility are key, but also the degree to which the information presented is comprehensible and perceived as interesting and intriguing. The question is then, how is this achieved? Marketers are forced to search for gaps in the marketing communication of the mainstream, probably more intensively now than ever before.

## 1.2. Storytelling - The Holy Grail of Marketing?

Storytelling has historically been a part of our species since the very beginning. The emergence of storytelling could be used as a defining moment for the species we are today (Boyd, 2009). Storytelling started as an oral tradition and eventually proceeded to plays and literature. Because of the extensive history of the human being telling stories in different forms, there was an extremely well-articulated notion of how to tell a story when humanity began to create full-length movies only a century ago (Cutting, 2016). As a relatively modern form of storytelling, popular movies have considerable effects on our lives. Movies are usually emotionally absorbing, thought-provoking, educational, and entertaining, all at the same time (Brewer & Lichtenstein, 1982).

Recent research by Cutting (2016) shows that filmmakers across all genres have since 1935 used different film styles for different parts of the movies to facilitate absorption, put the viewer in the correct emotional state, and make it as easy as possible for the viewer to take in the complex information by reducing the cognitive load. Comparing

the challenges that filmmakers already have mastered to the challenges of many firms in today's competitive marketing environment, it is easy to see the similarities.

Moreover, research relating to Customer Storytelling Theory shows that customers are already converting experiences with brands into stories, and the stories we tell about brands will shape our own and others' interpretations and impressions of the brand itself. By retelling stories of previous experiences and positioning themselves as the protagonist, customers will experience an emotional peak due to the nostalgic pleasure of reliving the experience, and the fulfillment of archetypal myths (Woodside et al., 2008). The experience will also become more memorable and the information more retrievable if advertisements are perceived to have storytelling elements compared to attribute-benefit-satisfaction arguments (Bruner, 1990; Schank, 1990). This argues that consumers of advertisements will have similar positive implications from storytelling to those positive implications realized by movie watchers. But how exactly could marketers use storytelling in marketing communications?

Donald Miller (2017) published the book "Building a Storybrand: Clarify Your Message So Customers Will Listen", presenting a method of clarifying marketing communications using storytelling techniques to make it easier for brands to stand out and make their customers better take in the message. Miller's company has helped over 3000 businesses grow using storytelling in their marketing communications (Miller, 2017). Knowing how similar the challenges of a company to stand out are to the challenges of filmmakers, could Donald Miller's (2017) method of using storytelling in general marketing communications be the Holy Grail of marketing that comes to the aid of the modern marketer in these times of failure when it is needed the most?

### 1.3. Current Storytelling Usage Within Marketing

Storytelling is already to a certain extent used in mainstream marketing, frequently occurring in the form of brand stories that serve a strategic purpose in narrating, communicating, and portraying the brand in question - often with the main intent of increasing brand awareness and memorability. A well-known example of this is the founder of L.L. Bean, Leon Leonwood Bean's story, which has been used by the retail company since its inception. Instead of solely or mainly focusing on communicating product features and advantages, the focus has been put on communicating an intriguing, involving, and seemingly authentic story of Leon Leonwood Bean's passion and care for product quality, and prioritization of customer interests - a message that also carries an obvious strategic value. A similar technique can be seen in the usage of

IKEA's market communication including the stories of their founder, Ingvar Kamprad's stories, and journey "from child entrepreneur to IKEA founder" (Aaker & Aaker, 2016).

#### 1.4. Purpose, Contribution to Existing Theory, and Limitations

Given the above-stated arguments, the purpose of the thesis becomes to answer what effects using Donald Miller's (2017) seven elements will have on the customer's interpretations and intentions when used in general marketing communication.

**Research Question:** What effects do Donald Miller's (2017) seven elements have on the customer's interpretations and intentions when used in general marketing communication of toothpaste?

Although research has been done on brand stories, calls to action in marketing, storytelling techniques, and the customer psychology of storytelling, no research has been done on Donald Miller's (2017) method of using storytelling techniques in general marketing communications. This presents the opportunity of exploring possible similarities between narrative theory and marketing communications and the thesis will thus contribute to and potentially expand existing theory. However, the thesis has its limitations. Since the digital survey used to collect data was in Swedish, only data from people who speak Swedish have been collected and analyzed. Additionally, toothpaste was chosen as the product to examine due to time and resource constraints, meaning that the data only reflects what effects Miller's (2017) method has on toothpaste advertisements. Because toothpaste may be considered a low-involvement and functional product (Percy & Donovan, 1991), this study does not examine any general effects across industries.

## 2. Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

This chapter intends to cover relevant research relating to the research question, and the following theories and concepts have been found when searching for relevant studies using library databases. The chapter starts off with Section 2.1 which introduces Donald Miller's (2017) seven elements taken from alleged storytelling techniques that are argued to clarify marketing communications, make the information easier to take in, and generate interest to grow businesses. However, to assess whether the seven elements will positively impact the customer's interpretations and intentions, one must, first of all, investigate if the alleged storytelling techniques in Miller's (2017) theory are rooted and grounded in academic research regarding storytelling outside the scope of business. Secondly, one must re-apply the marketing setting and investigate if the goals achieved by the storytelling techniques are likely to positively impact customers as well as movie watchers using customer psychology. Thirdly, one must look at the effects of the relatively limited storytelling that is already being used in marketing today. Lastly, research regarding one of Miller's (2017) elements will be considered and hypotheses will be made from the findings at the very end of this chapter.

### 2.1. Building a Storybrand

One way of utilizing storytelling techniques in general marketing communications has been addressed in Donald Miller's (2017) book "Building a Storybrand: Clarify Your Message So Customers Will Listen", and it references the Hierarchy of Needs, a five-part pyramid of human motivation. Maslow (1943) identified Physiological Needs at the bottom of the pyramid, motivating the human being to achieve basic survival needs such as food and water. Once these needs are satisfied, Safety Needs become the motivator and include, for example, employment, personal health, and property. Love Needs come thereafter and include friendship, family, and intimacy. Forth comes the Esteem Needs and they may include self-esteem, respect, status, and freedom. When all of these four needs have been satisfied, the human being gets motivated by the fifth and last need called The Need for Self-Actualization. In essence, human beings constantly want to become the best version of themselves (Maslow, 1943).

“There’s a reason most marketing collateral doesn’t work, ... Their marketing is too complicated. The brain doesn’t know how to process the information. The more simple and predictable the communication, the easier it is for the brain to digest. Story helps because it is a sense-making mechanism. Essentially, story formulas put everything in order so the brain doesn’t have to work to understand what’s going on.” (Donald Miller 2017, p. 6)

Miller (2017) suggests that there are two common mistakes that brands make. Firstly, they fail to communicate the aspects of an offer that will make the customer live and thrive. The human brain constantly filters out all information in our lives, including advertisements, if the information does not help us achieve anything in Maslow’s (1943) Hierarchy of Needs. Secondly, most brands cause customers to burn too many calories to understand the offer. We can solve both of these problems by using storytelling. More specifically, there are seven elements of great storytelling that can be used to grow businesses if they are used in marketing communications. The seven elements relate to a specific narrative structure that is used in all genres of storytelling: A character (1), has a problem (2), meets a guide (3), who gives them a plan (4), and calls them to action (5), that helps them avoid failure (6), and ends in a success (7). These elements can be used in marketing communication as well to create clarity and make the message easier to take in (Miller, 2017). The following sections will go through the seven elements one by one.

#### 2.1.1. A Character

The hero and the guide are the two most central characters in both storytelling and business. The hero of the story is the flawed protagonist who has desires and goals but encounters problems along the way. The hero then meets the guide, who helps the hero solve the problems and reach the hero’s goals. In business, it is crucial that the customer is represented as the hero of the story and not the brand itself. If we position the brand as the hero, the customer has no interest in the story. The guide is more experienced and has the tools that the hero is desperate for to reach their goals. Naturally, a brand should then see itself as the guide and not the hero since the hero usually has self-doubts and lacks experience (Miller, 2017).

One aspect of normal life that also is an aspect of storytelling is called story gaps. Storytellers begin to create story gaps by letting the audience know that the hero wants something, for example, love. As the hero meets a person who shows signs of love, the storyteller closes the gap, but only to let another gap open up. For example, the love interest might get captured by the villain. If the hero eventually rescues the love interest,

the story gap is finally closed and such a goal becomes more satisfying when fulfilled. This is similar to the psychology of having a desire, for example, hunger. The hunger we feel is the opening of a story gap, and the food we eat closes the gap and brings a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment. Marketers can create story gaps in marketing communication by being explicit about the customer's desires early to create a natural state of desire (Miller, 2017).

#### 2.1.2. Has a Problem

In all stories, the hero encounters problems that stand between them and their goals. A villain is used in stories to create conflict. There are villains in customers' lives too that companies are relatively used to personifying. Worth considering is that the villain must be the root cause of the problem, relatable, singular, and real. The villain, and the confrontations that arise as a result, make the story interesting (Miller, 2017).

Three types of problems are present in most stories. Firstly, external problems are obvious external desires that come from the environment. While external problems are essential in stories, it is hardly the only problem that challenges the hero. Secondly, internal problems are partially caused by external problems but are different because the source of the problem comes from inside the character and is usually about problems with oneself instead of the environment. Lastly, philosophical problems are larger than the stories themselves. They answer the question "Why is the story worth retelling?" The answer should reflect a world that we want to live in and oftentimes builds on "shoulds". The most powerful scene in any story happens when the hero defeats all of the problems simultaneously. When Luke destroys the Death Star in the movie "Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope" (1977) and defeats the Galactic Empire (external problem), he also proves to himself that he is not too young to be a Jedi (internal problem), and the good side wins over the evil (philosophical problem), all at once (Miller, 2017).

Marketers usually only focus on communicating how they solve their customer's external problems, but customers mainly buy solutions to their internal problems. By only focusing on the external problem, companies fail to show the true depths of people's lives. The brand can thus relate better to the customer by communicating the solution to their internal problems. For a house-painting company, for example, a tagline that focuses on both internal and external problems would be "Paint that will make your neighbors jealous", recognizing the paint as the external problem but also an internal problem - the embarrassment that comes from having a house with poor paint. Philosophical problems in marketing are about connecting the brand to something

greater than the business itself to make the customer understand the greater value of the company in a statement that the customers can agree with. A company selling pet food can have the following tagline to include a philosophical problem: “Pets deserve to eat healthy food too.” (Miller, 2017).

#### 2.1.3. And Meets a Guide

The guide in a story is crucial in helping the hero achieve their goals. Great heroes in stories need to communicate empathy and authority. Empathy is communicated when the guide makes the hero feel seen, heard, and understood, but that alone will not motivate the hero to change. Authority must also be present. The guide must show their authority and the fact that they have whatever the hero does not have. Showing empathy in marketing communications will generate trust and can be done by understanding and caring for the customer’s problems. By also showing how similar the company is to its customers, marketers can use powerful and primal parts of the brain that tells us that if we are similar to another person, we are able to transform the unknown nuances of that person into trust. Showing authority in marketing communications can be dangerous as it might come off as bragging, which will divert away the customer. It is then important for marketers to ensure that the customer knows in the back of their minds that the company has authority without making it too obvious (Miller, 2017).

#### 2.1.4. Who Gives Them a Plan

In storytelling, once the guide has established a relationship with the hero, the guide provides the hero with a plan to overcome their problems. The guide reduces the perceived risk for the hero by showing the best way forward, making the commitment easier. The same can be said about business. There are two types of plans that reduce the risk for the customer: the Process Plan and the Agreement Plan (Miller, 2017).

The Process Plan is used to alleviate confusion and tells the customer exactly what steps are needed to purchase the product, use the product, or both. A Process Plan with post- and pre-purchase steps might be “Test-drive a car (1), purchase the car (2), and enjoy free maintenance for life (3)”. The Agreement Plan is instead used to alleviate fears that the customer might have by guaranteeing certain outcomes (Miller, 2017).

#### 2.1.5. And Calls Them To Action

Every story needs a point towards the end where the hero is forced to action, a “call to action”. This is to add realism to the story, most people require some sort of call to action before doing something extraordinary. In business, it is therefore beneficial to show a call to action. “Buy Now” is a direct call to action, but there are also transformative calls to action that usually contain something for free to build the

relationship further before the customer feels confident enough to make a purchase. It might be a free webinar or a downloadable PDF with more information (Miller, 2017).

#### 2.1.6. That Helps Them Avoid Failure

In a story, it is essential that the audience are aware of the detrimental consequences that can happen if the hero does not prevail. Marketing communication should also let the customers know the risks of not making a purchase. Miller (2017) further argues that communicating the following four points will let the customer know about the risks of not purchasing:

- Alert the customer about the threat. “Nearly 30 percent of all homes have evidence of termite infestation.”
- Let the reader know that they should take action to reduce their vulnerability. “Since nobody wants termites, you should do something about it to protect your home.”
- Give the customer a specific call to action that protects them from the risk. “We offer a complete home treatment that will insure your house is free of termites.”
- Challenge the customer to take this specific action. “Call us today and schedule your home treatment.”

#### 2.1.7. And Ends In a Success

Storytelling has three dominant ways to end a story. Firstly, storytellers tie the end with the need for status by having the hero win power or a position. Secondly, storytellers can end stories in a way that makes the character whole, and where an external component is needed to create completeness. Miller (2017) then makes the argument that the human being gets satisfaction when something incomplete gets completed, and companies can create completeness by reducing anxiety, reducing the workload, or giving the customer more time. Thirdly, storytellers know that human beings also want to transform into their full potential. Thus, brands should create an aspirational identity and associate the product with that identity (Miller, 2017).

## 2.2. Narrative Theory

When examining if Miller’s (2017) seven elements to clarify marketing communications will in fact have a positive impact on the customer’s interpretations and intentions, it becomes interesting to explore if and how the seven elements link to existing research regarding storytelling outside the scope of business to solve similar problems to the ones faced by marketers.

Movies are a relatively new version of storytelling but still use narrative structures. A filmmaker has to format a vast amount of information that is presented in a relatively short period of time into a structure that makes it easier and less energy-consuming for the audience to take in. Research by James E. Cutting (2016) shows that filmmakers have been formatting movies for over 70 years by using a four-act structure to create a consistency that reduces the cognitive load on the viewer and drives the viewer's emotions and attention (Cutting, 2016).

### 2.2.1. A Brief History of Storytelling

Although a major part of storytelling today is in the form of movies, theater and plays have historically been where storytelling has been most prominent. Aristotle was the first to formulate a narrative structure over 2500 years ago. He proposed that theater should be structured in three acts: the protasis, the epistasis, and the catastrophe. The first act should introduce the characters and the setting. The second act should build the action of the story up to a climax. The last act should present the climax and a final resolution (Pavis, 1998).

In traditional theater, the different acts are represented by a pause in the action whereby the curtains fall and the audience and actors get a chance to rest. Narrative units in movies are also commonly called acts. However, movies do not usually include pauses in this manner. The aim of a filmmaker is to create in the audience a desire to stay and find out what happens next in a continuous flow. Movies however still have joints between the different parts (Cutting, 2016). Bordwell (2006) and Thompson (1999) suggest that in most movies today, there are four acts; the Setup (26 minutes), the Complication (28 minutes), the Development (26 minutes), and the Climax (25 minutes). The Setup act introduces the characters, their goals, and the environment. In the Complication act, the main character realizes that new tactics must be put in place to reach the goals. In the Development, more focus is usually put on the surrounding characters while the main character struggles to reach the goal, broadening the story. The Climax is the last act where the main character finally gets into action. An Epilog is sometimes included to tie up loose ends in the story and establish a new normal (Cutting, 2016). In support of Bordwell (2006) and Thompson's (1999) structure, Thompson (1999) analyzed the narrative structure of 10 films in great detail and further briefly analyzed 100 films across 100 years, making this approach the most empirically supported to describe general narrative structure (Cutting, 2016).

### 2.2.2. Characteristics of Acts in Popular Movies

James E. Cutting (2016) analyzed 160 high-grossing movies between 1935 and 2010 in different genres to determine the characteristics of each act in terms of film style.

Evidence was found that the analyzed movies have a four-act structure similar to Bordwell's (2006) and Thompson's (1999) approach, but Cutting (2016) adds the emphasis that a prolog at the beginning and an epilog at the end should be considered separate parts due to the major film style differences.

Cutting's (2016) study showed significant differences between the Prolog, the Setup, the Complication, the Development, the Climax, and the Epilog in terms of editing, motion, sound, and framing. This indicates that filmmakers across genres have followed a narrative structure since 1935 and vastly change the film style for the different acts. The Prologue is where the filmmaker wants to let the viewer know that the movie will be an absorbing and interesting story. This is done by having a slow pace and using long shots to show the environment with music. They then proceed to the Setup where the characters are introduced along with their problems. Conversations, closer shot scales, and less motion are used to help the viewer take in the information (Cutting, 2005).

The Complication shows how the character is struggling to reach the goals with more close-ups while also changing direction slightly as the character realizes that they have to change their tactics. The Development is the darkest part of the story where the story gets slower in pace, deeper, and more complex as it passes the midpoint and approaches the Climax. The fast-paced action is back with the Climax which should increase the heart rate of the viewer, and this is where the absorption should be at a max up until the characters reach their goals. Music, motion, close-ups, and short shot durations are evident. As the characters reach their goals, the Epilog begins where the filmmakers include more conversations and go back to longer shot durations and scales. The Epilog serves the purpose to restore the world and the viewer's heart rates should return to normal levels (Cutting, 2016).

Knowing that characteristics such as sound, framing, editing, and motion change during a movie to facilitate absorption, and that the changes are designed to put the viewer in the correct emotional state to take in the information without using too much cognitive energy, it is easy to see that there is structure to narrative theory in movies across all genres. Because the different parts are designed in a certain way to make the audience remember the story and make the information more retrievable, it is reasonable to confirm that there are general storytelling techniques present and that the goals of filmmakers are very similar to the goals of the marketer. The storytelling techniques

have been perfected for centuries to suit different purposes such as theatre and movies. Could the next purpose be marketing communications?

### 2.3. Customer Storytelling Theory

Although Section 2.2 showed that Miller's (2017) elements are grounded in recent storytelling research and that filmmakers structure movies for similar purposes as a marketer creating market communications, one may claim that consumers of movies are too different from consumers of advertisements to say that the positive impacts on memorability and information retrievability will also be present for consumers of advertisements. When examining if the seven elements are likely to influence customers in a positive way, it becomes interesting to consider consumer psychology to add back the marketing setting.

There are five reasons why storytelling is important when understanding customer psychology (Woodside et al., 2008); First, people naturally think narratively and not argumentatively or pragmatically (Hiltunen, 2002; McKee & Fryer, 2003; Weick, 1995). Second, a substantial amount of information stored in our memories is in the form of stories that include inciting incidents, outcomes, and experiences (Fournier, 1998; Schank, 1990). Third, Aristotle believed that repeat-watching or reliving stories result in "proper pleasure" by experiencing one or more archetypal myths (Holt, 2003; Jung, 2014). The fourth reason why storytelling is important when understanding customer psychology is that brands and products are a vital part of enabling customers to achieve the "proper pleasure" that comes from the customer mentally or physically enacting archetypes and reliving the experience by retelling the story. Fifth, people seek clarity and an understanding of prior conversations, events, and outcomes from themselves and others. They do this by telling stories, and the reason why this works is because of the specific archetypes that we are able to identify within our own experiences by formatting them into stories (Woodside et al., 2008). In order to understand the five reasons better, the following three paragraphs will explain archetypes, myths, and "proper pleasure" further.

Archetypes are unconscious primary forms in the human mind that are not learned or acquired (Jung, 2014). Archetypal images can today be observed all over the world and they originate from Akkad and Sumer at around 2500 B.C. (Campbell, 1968; Campbell, 1974). They reflect widely recognized symbols such as the tree of life or the earth as a womb. Research shows that customers use archetypes in stories they tell about their own life, including brand experiences (Hirschman, 2000). Thus, brands can enable a

customer to enact archetypes and myths (Woodside et al., 2008). Myths are stories about heroes or supernatural beings that often explain the origins of natural phenomena or aspects of human behavior. The rebellion myth, for example, explains the human behavior of some people in that rules are meant to be broken (Mark & Pearson, 2001). Some brands become “icons” by allowing the customer to consciously or unconsciously experience powerful myths. Myths help people make sense of the world by providing ideals to live by, and “icon” brands deliver the myths in tangible forms to make them more accessible to the customer (Holt, 2003).

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle was the first to connect storytelling techniques to emotional experiences. Aristotle believed that enacting powerful archetypal myths will result in “proper pleasure”, and this type of pleasure can explain why some stories become more successful than others, still to this date. When asked why we enjoy certain movies more than others, common answers are that the actors are great or that the scenery is beautiful, aspects that however are still present in many less successful movies. The unconscious nature of “proper pleasure” presents a reason why movie watchers are unable to say explicitly what in a movie is great and why another movie with similar actors and scenery fails to give them the same pleasure (Hiltunen, 2002).

#### 2.3.1. Four Examples of Archetypal Myths

To get a better understanding of archetypes, consider these four examples of how archetypal myths are used in stories and marketing. Firstly, the Underdog is an archetype that is represented by a relatable and ordinary character who gets thrown into extraordinary circumstances, and the character wants to change the world in some sense. Brands can use this archetype by positioning themselves and their customers as the David that fights Goliath. Secondly, the Disruptor archetype is represented by characters who are heroic rebels fighting for change. The characters are aspirational rather than relatable, and because they are idealized versions of ordinary people, it can be difficult for the audience to relate to the character. Thus, it is important in marketing to show vulnerability and relatability so customers feel like they can become such heroes themselves (Pereira, 2019).

Thirdly, the Survivor archetype is represented in stories as a relatable character who strives for preservation against all odds. A car brand might depict this archetype by telling the story of ordinary people who survived a car accident thanks to their car. Fourthly, the Protector is a larger-than-life aspirational character that wants to protect the world. Although they are heroic, it becomes easier for the audience to relate to the Protector as opposed to the Disruptor since the Protector wants to protect the world

instead of changing it. However, it is still important to show a hint of vulnerability for brands using the Protector archetype. Brands often use luxury and excellence to be seen as larger-than-life, and showing the transition from an ordinary person into a hero may be a method of showing relatability (Pereira, 2019).

### 2.3.2. Why Do People Want To Share Stories?

Storytelling is thus important to consider in customer psychology, but why do people want to share their own life stories with others? There are two main reasons (Woodside et al., 2008); First, telling stories is inherently pleasurable to the authors because they can be the protagonist of the story and have the ability to vent anger or report bliss about an event. Repeating the storytelling activity will result in a nostalgic experience where the storyteller receives enjoyment from reliving past experiences (Schindler & Holbrook, 2003). Second, telling stories allows the storyteller to unconsciously experience archetype fulfillment. By positioning themselves as the protagonist, the storyteller can provide evidence that they are a certain archetypal primal form, such as the rebel, hero, or just the regular person (Woodside et al., 2008). Another important factor for why human beings tell and consume stories is that storytelling will deepen the sense-making of events taking place in the story and what the complete story says about the individuals involved and others (Woodside et al., 2008). In fact, some argue that all sense-making is retrospective and based on storytelling (Weick, 1995).

### 2.3.3. Drama Versus Lectures in Advertisements

Classical Drama presents a description of a good and memorable story. One or more inciting incidents take place within a setting that creates conscious/unconscious goals, and actions by characters within the story give certain outcomes that are temporary occurrences of world blocks and/or personal blocks. World blocks are, for example, an antagonist temporarily preventing the protagonist from reaching their goals, and personal goals are, for example, the protagonist lacking the skills that are needed to reach the goals. These blocks are there to increase both the viewer's and the protagonist's emotions and involvement in the story. The protagonist usually seeks help from others to overcome the blocks (McKee & Fryer, 2003).

The emotions are likely to shift throughout the story, and a consumer is expected to experience four positive emotional peaks when a drama form is present. The consumer has an initial emotional peak due to the expectation that they might be a part of an extraordinary experience. They then take the first step and experience an emotional peak due to the inciting incident. Toward the end of the interaction, the consumer experiences an emotional peak due to the feeling of fulfillment and resolution.

Importantly, however, the consumer also experiences a final emotional peak by retelling the story and thereby reflecting on what lesson has been learned (Woodside et al., 2008).

While some advertisements represent dramas, more common forms of advertisement are called lectures. Lectures in advertisements have an argumentative nature where the advertisement tries to convince the audience with attribute-benefit-satisfaction arguments (Woodside et al., 2008). While lecture formats in advertisements are likely to evoke argumentative thinking, having a narrative format will make the experience more memorable and the information more retrievable (Bruner, 1990; Schank, 1990). Constructing a story where the brand is a supporting actor enabling the protagonist to achieve conscious or unconscious goals will have a positive impact on the consumer-brand relationships (Woodside et al., 2008).

Thus, Consumer Storytelling Theory claims that consumers of movies and consumers of advertisements are not so different from each other, and to say that the positive implications of storytelling structure are not likely to transfer to a marketing setting for consumers of advertisements would be a false statement.

## 2.4. Brand Stories

As aforementioned and previously asserted, storytelling is at present time used in mainstream marketing to a certain extent. Currently, the apparent main form of storytelling is in brand stories, the technique of using storytelling to present the business or founder, most commonly as the hero of market communication. The question then arises; what effect on the perception of market communications does this have? Why do some organizations, like IKEA and L.L. Bean, swear by this way of portraying themselves? The benefits of the usage of brand stories can be summarized in three main points.

First of all, it increases the memorability of the facts that are being presented. If facts or information about the product or service that is being offered is communicated through the usage of storytelling in this manner, it makes the facts themselves easier to remember for potential consumers. This is due to the fact that stories get more attention from consumers since they are often perceived as more intriguing, interesting, and captivating. It also offers a way of information being conveniently organized in the minds of consumers - it is easier to remember one cohesive story, than a number of facts, for example (Aaker & Aaker, 2016).

Brand stories are also perceived as more persuasive in the minds of consumers. Information that is perceived in conjunction with a story instead of through cold, hard facts, has a higher chance of impacting the beliefs and perspectives of consumers. This is due to a number of reasons. First and foremost, a person that is trying to convey a story is generally perceived as more authentic, trustworthy, likable, and agreeable than a person that is exclusively attempting to convey facts. It is also easier to convey feelings through stories, rather than with facts or statistics. If brands are able to convey stories embossed by positive emotions, the odds of the consumers associating the brand, products, or services with these emotions increase. It has also been ascertained that we are less prone to be suspicious of information conveyed through stories, meaning that counterarguments and skepticism from consumers are less prone to happen (Aaker & Aaker, 2016).

## 2.5. Call to Action in Marketing

Miller's (2017) fifth element suggests that a brand should include a call to action, and plenty of research has examined the effects of including a call to action in marketing communications. In direct mailings, for example, a company may use a textual trigger as a "call" and a customer response as an "action" (Vafainia et al., 2019). Alternatively, a company may use an incentive as the "call" (Prins & Verhoef, 2007; Rust & Verhoef, 2005). The incentive might be monetary by including price discounts or nonmonetary by including premiums. Premiums might be a product or service for free or at a low price (d'Astous & Jacob, 2002; Palazon & Delgado-Ballester, 2013). The premiums are either hedonic or utilitarian. While hedonic premium incentives are designed to be fun, enjoyable, and exciting, utilitarian premium incentives are mostly functional (Palazon & Delgado-Ballester, 2013). It then becomes clear that Miller's (2017) fifth element concerning a "transitional call to action" can be explained in research as a utilitarian nonmonetary incentive, while a "direct call to action" can be explained by marketing communication that only uses a textual trigger without an incentive.

Call to action in direct mailing has been proven to have a positive effect on behavioral measures such as purchase incidence, frequency, and amount (Gázquez-Abad et al., 2011). This is because the customer realizes that the call to action is a method used by the company to reduce the effort and risk of making a purchase, thereby increasing their decision confidence (Fitzsimons & Lehmann, 2004). However, the customer may also feel that the call to action is a method used by the company to manipulate the customer's

decisions and exercise control over the customer, which will make the customer respond negatively when a call to action is present (Godfrey et al., 2011).

One way of mitigating the feeling of being manipulated might be by using an incentive to create reciprocity. In fact, having incentives in the call to action will lead to higher customer shares and additional sales (Bawa & Shoemaker, 1987), and response rates are higher when incentives are present in direct mail (Arora & Stoner, 1992). It has also been found that nonmonetary premiums lead to a more substantial impact compared to monetary premiums (Diamond, 1990) since monetary premiums are mostly seen as loss reduction (Sinha & Smith, 2000) while nonmonetary premiums are considered separate gains since you receive something without committing to a purchase (Nunes & Park, 2003). Furthermore, the utilitarian reward has been found to increase the customer's purchase intentions as opposed to a hedonistic reward (Vafainia et al., 2019).

## 2.6. Hypothesis Development

With the knowledge of previous studies regarding the research question of what effects to expect when using Miller's (2017) elements in general marketing communications, the following section presents the hypotheses that this study will examine.

Because of the difficulties of constructing marketing communication without any methods further explained in Section 3.2, the study will compare the effects of using two different parts of Donald Miller's (2017) seven elements against each other. Mainly, it is argued that the first three elements are relatively novel and use logic coming from narrative theory rather than pre-established marketing techniques. Introducing the customer's desires early to create a story gap, positioning the customer as the hero and the company as the guide, identifying the villain, and communicating the external, internal, and philosophical problems are all related to narrative theory. The last four elements are instead argued to be relatively well-known pre-established marketing methods where substantial research has already been made. The last four elements are about including a process plan, calls to action, highlighting the customer cost of not making a purchase, and communicating what the customer wants to transform into.

When making hypotheses, one should start by considering what research previously has found. Studies regarding calls to action in marketing have found that purchase intentions should increase with the presence of a call to action with a utilitarian and nonmonetary incentive (Vafainia et al., 2019), or what Donald Miller (2017) calls a "transitional call to action". The reason is that customers see the call to action as an

effort by the company to lower the risks of making a purchase, but they may also see calls to action as manipulation efforts. Giving away a nonmonetary utilitarian reward mitigates the customer feeling manipulated (Vafainia et al., 2019). Thus, the following hypothesis is made:

**H1:** Consumers will exhibit higher levels of purchase intentions when exposed to marketing communications using Miller's (2017) last four elements as opposed to Miller's (2017) first three elements.

Studies on brand stories show that stories are structured in such a way that reduces the cognitive load required to take in information, and customers will pay more attention to the message and find it interesting and more memorable (Aaker & Aaker, 2016). The other theories explained in detail in Chapter 2 further argue that storytelling techniques in advertisements should decrease the cognitive load, increase the ad interest, and increase the ad memorability:

Taking findings from Narrative Theory, there has been a clear structure of stories since the dawn of our species. In modern movies, the story structure is there to increase the ease of taking in the vast amount of information and remembering it (Cutting, 2016). Customer Storytelling Theory explains that the human being naturally forms memories and understandings into stories in our minds, and formatting advertisements in such a manner should decrease the cognitive load and increase the ad memorability (Woodside et al., 2008).

Movies use a prologue to show the world in order and open up a story gap during the introduction by putting the world out of order. The story gap closes in the epilogue by showing a new normal where the hero achieved their desires. Additionally, filmmakers give the hero external, internal, and philosophical problems and after consulting with a guide, the hero solves all problems, giving a satisfying ending. The reason why filmmakers structure movies in such a manner is that it makes the viewer invested in the story and the message (Cutting, 2016). The different problems are also understood by Customer Storytelling Theory where they are instead called world- and personal blocks. The psychological reason why we find stories more interesting compared to ads using attribute-benefit-satisfaction arguments is that drama advertisements enable the customer to enact powerful archetypal myths and experience proper pleasure and emotional peaks by retelling the experience (Woodside et al., 2008). Given the above-stated arguments, the following hypotheses are made:

**H2:** Consumers will exhibit lower levels of cognitive resource demands when exposed to marketing communications using Miller's (2017) first three elements as opposed to Miller's (2017) last four elements.

**H3:** Consumers will exhibit higher levels of ad interest when exposed to marketing communications using Miller's (2017) first three elements as opposed to Miller's (2017) last four elements.

**H4:** Consumers will exhibit higher levels of ad memorability when exposed to marketing communications using Miller's (2017) first three elements as opposed to Miller's (2017) last four elements.

Consumer Storytelling Theory also argues that brands can increase consumer-brand relationships by allowing the customer to enact powerful archetypal myths and achieve conscious or unconscious goals (Woodside et al., 2008). However, few brands format their advertisements in such a manner. Thus, the following hypothesis is made regarding brand distinctiveness:

**H5:** Brand distinctiveness will be assessed higher by the consumers when exposed to marketing communications using Miller's (2017) first three elements as opposed to Miller's (2017) last four elements.

### 3. Method

To collect data, it was chosen to conduct a standardized digital questionnaire using the software Qualtrics. There are several reasons why this method was selected. Since it was intended to collect answers from as many respondents as possible, using surveys in this manner entails pros, such as the wide reach that can be achieved by distributing reference links to the survey en masse, via email, for example, while simultaneously having centralized access to administrative tools. Another benefit of great importance is the ease of analysis. Since the results of the survey are registered digitally, they can conveniently be exported in different file formats for data analysis, regardless of the number of respondents.

The potential downsides of this method include survey fatigue, which consequently could cause response bias. In addition to this, respondents not fully completing the survey- quitting halfway, is another risk with this method. Since a link to the survey was distributed digitally, and since no personal data was collected, there is no direct control over the respondent demographic, which could lead to either over- or underrepresentation of certain demographics among the respondents, impacting the statistical credibility.

A potential alternative method would have been to conduct interviews. The pros associated with this method would have been that direct control over the respondent demographic would have been possible to a greater extent, meaning that problems associated with demographic over- and underrepresentation could be prevented with a higher certainty. For example, reaching certain demographics might be more difficult through digital means. It is also reasonable to believe that the rate of respondents completing the survey would be higher when conducting interviews in comparison to questionnaires.

However, this would have been very resource-intensive. Interviews are time-consuming, especially when accounting for a high volume of respondents, and the results are also more difficult to quantify and analyze in comparison to digital surveys. Interviews are also more difficult to standardize, as the answers could be influenced by who is asking them, in what way the questions are formulated, tone of voice, choice of words, and more. Studies also show that respondents are generally more honest when giving answers via a survey, unlike a face-to-face interview, which also would harm the credibility of these potential results (Preisendörfer & Wolter, 2014). Another potential

alternative method would have been to conduct field research through real-world experiments. This would have allowed for observations to be conducted from a close-up perspective, and could provide better conditions for accounting for contextual factors that may impact results.

However, there are a set of difficulties associated with this method. Certain variables, such as brand attitude, will be affected and embossed by pre-existing brand attitudes with respondents. To increase the validity of data collected with this method, a wide variety of different brands would have to be examined. This is not only implying a practical challenge but also a theoretical one, considering how to optimally compose a group of brands to examine to diminish the pre-existing brand attitudes' impact on results to the greatest extent possible.

### 3.1. Research Approach

Using an objective ontological approach, the deductive method was chosen to test data collected in a digital survey. The classical experiment gained knowledge regarding the research question following a positivistic epistemological viewpoint. In other words, the observations made are assumed to exist independently without social actors, and the reality is measured quantitatively (Bell et al., 2022). The survey used a between-subject experiment where participants were exposed to one of two different stimuli.

### 3.2. Stimulus Development

Two different stimuli were created and the marketing communication was designed to be from a fictitious toothpaste brand attracting the attention of potential customers. The product was chosen because most people have a rather neutral view of toothpaste - most people use toothpaste regularly but might not have a particular interest in toothpaste or dental health. Simultaneously, not many people are expected to dislike toothpaste. It was also important that no brand was mentioned to ensure that previous marketing communication and brand attitudes toward that specific brand were not impacting the results. One can argue that selecting multiple products and creating more stimuli would be a more appropriate approach in order to examine general effects across industries. However, given the scope of this study, having more than two stimuli would require a larger sample size. Due to time and resource constraints, it was deemed that two stimuli of a toothpaste ad were the most appropriate for this study.

Stimulus 1 uses Miller's (2017) first three elements which are considered novel storytelling techniques while Stimulus 2 uses the last four elements which are considered pre-established marketing techniques (see Section 2.7 for further motivation). This division was chosen because of the difficulties arriving when trying to compare marketing communication using Miller's (2017) elements against marketing communication not using Miller's (2017) elements. While this approach would have examined the exact effects of using all of Miller's (2017) elements against no method at all, the issue becomes how to formulate marketing communication without using any methods. For example, a stimulus where benefits and information are stated in a bulleted list would examine the differences between textual against list communication. Furthermore, by comparing the two distinct parts of Miller's (2017) elements, findings regarding if each part brings the desired effects are possible, meaning that such a study becomes more explanatory.

Note that both Stimulus 1 and 2 were written and shown in the survey in Swedish. See Appendix 1 for an English version of the Stimuli, and Appendix 2 for the original Swedish version.

### 3.2.1. Stimulus 1: Novel Storytelling Techniques

The first stimulus contained Miller's (2017) first three elements covering character introduction positioning the customer as the hero and the company as the guide, including story gaps, and communicating the customer's external, internal, and philosophical problems. Since Miller (2017) advocates strongly for the presence of an early story gap, the opening sentence of Stimulus 1 communicates the desire to feel confident in our own smile (see Appendix 1). The second sentence personifies the villain - most people use the wrong kind of toothpaste for their specific teeth, stopping us from having a confident smile. The external problem of having yellow teeth and the internal problem of not being confident in our smile are addressed in the third sentence while also adding empathy to position the brand as the guide by showing an understanding of the customer's problem and relating to it. The last sentence further establishes the customer as the hero by stating that the brand has previously helped over two million people, which also adds the authority needed to fully position the brand as the guide. The very end of the last sentence adds the philosophical problem that everyone deserves a confident smile. Stimulus 1 also includes The Protector archetype (Pereira, 2019) where the customer can relive an ordinary person's transformation into an aspirational and heroic character that wants to preserve their teeth and live a prosperous life.

### 3.2.2. Stimulus 2: Pre-established Marketing Techniques

Miller's (2017) method also uses pre-established marketing techniques, and these are present in Stimulus 2. These techniques can be found in Miller's (2017) last four elements concerning giving the customer a plan, calling them to action, highlighting the risks, and ending in success. Given the findings from research regarding the presence of a call to action in marketing communication, Stimulus 2 was designed to include a call to action with a utilitarian nonmonetary incentive (Vafainia et al., 2019), or what Miller (2017) calls a "transitional call to action". A transitional call to action was included in Stimulus 2 by mentioning a free online guide for the customer to find out the perfect toothpaste for their individual needs. The call to action is followed by a process plan explaining how to buy the correct toothpaste and use it for optimal results. The entirety of the first paragraph in Stimulus 2 is an adaptation of Miller's (2017) template of how to successfully incorporate the risks of not purchasing which can be found in Chapter 2.1.6. Stimulus 2 ends in success by having the last sentence reduce the anxiety of getting dental problems in the future, and mentions what the customer wants to transform into - a confident person with healthy white teeth to last a lifetime.

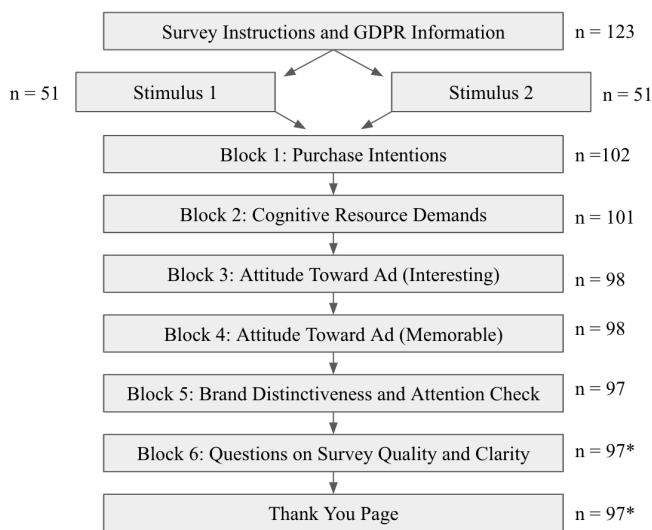
## 3.3. Procedure and Participants

The online survey was distributed to participants (n=123) between November 9 2022 and November 29 2022 through convenience sampling (Bell et al., 2022) to friends and family, as well as through emails to students at a Swedish business school. Additional motivation for people to partake in the survey was created by donating 5 SEK for each completed survey to "Barncancerfonden", a well-known Swedish charity fighting childhood cancer.

The digital survey was designed so that 50% of the participants were exposed to a page showing Stimulus 1, and the other 50% of the participants were exposed to a page showing Stimulus 2. All of the pages before and after the stimulus page were the same for both sets of participants. The first page of the survey presented brief background information regarding the survey, while the second page showed GDPR information and the participant had to agree to participate in the survey in order to progress to the next page. The third page instructed the participant to read the following marketing communication on page four carefully, and answer the following question pages truthfully. An instructional manipulation check (Oppenheimer et al., 2009) was added on the second last question page to rule out any participants clicking random answers and not paying attention. The question instructed the participant to answer with the

alternative “Disagree”. The completed survey results by the 15 participants who did not answer the instructional manipulation check question with “Disagree” were subsequently removed from the data sample to make sure all participants read and answered each question carefully. The survey ended with a question page regarding the participant’s opinion on the survey itself, followed by a thank you page.

**Figure 1.** An illustration of the survey flow and the number of respondents per block.



*Note:* \* The results from 15 of these participants were subsequently removed from the data sample because they failed to answer the attention check appropriately.

### 3.4. Measures

See Appendix 3 for a full presentation of the measures. Note that all of the questions and answer alternatives in the survey were translated into Swedish.

#### 3.4.1. Purchase Intentions

Purchase intentions is a measure indicating how likely a person is to purchase a specific product and is measured using three items. Responses on a seven-point scale (1-7) were observed from the participants relating to how likely they were to “try out the product in the ad”, “purchase the product in the ad”, and “pay a higher price for the product in the ad” (Yang & Smith, 2009).

#### 3.4.2. Cognitive Resource Demands

Cognitive resource demands measure the perceived difficulty a person has in understanding the message of an advertisement and is measured according to a scale using three, seven-point semantic differentials (1-7). Participants were asked to assess if

the message in the ad was “difficult to process/easy to process”, “difficult to understand/easy to understand”, and “difficult to comprehend/easy to comprehend” (White & Peloza, 2009).

#### 3.4.3. Attitude Toward the Ad (Interest)

The attitude toward the ad (Interest), hereby also called “Ad interest”, measures the extent to which a participant believes the advertisement is pleasant and arousing. It uses three seven-point Likert-type scales (1-7) where the participants were asked to assess to what extent the ad was “interesting”, “entertaining”, and “boring” (Schweidel et al., 2006).

#### 3.4.4. Attitude Toward the Ad (Memorable)

Attitude toward the ad (memorable), hereby also called “Ad memorability” is a measure that uses three, seven-point Likert-type items (1-7). It measures the degree to which a person describes the message of an advertisement as easy to remember and learn. The participants in the survey were asked to what extent they agreed with the statements “I remember a lot about the ad message”, “The claims made in the ad were memorable”, and “The ad message was easy to learn and remember” (Smith et al., 2008).

#### 3.4.5. Brand Distinctiveness

The measure called “brand distinctiveness” measures how different from other brands a person would describe a specific brand to be. It is measured using three nine-point Likert-type items (1-9). The participants were asked to what extent they agreed with the statements “This brand is distinctive from others”, “This brand is different from other brands”, and “This brand can be easily distinguished from other brands” (Zhou & Nakamoto, 2007).

### 3.5. Validity and Reliability

Validity considers the question of whether the measure in fact measures what it is supposed to measure (Söderlund, 2018). All of the measures used were taken directly from The Marketing Scales Handbook (Bearden & Netemeyer, 1999), meaning that the measures have been previously developed and tested by researchers to ensure their validity.

Reliability considers the question of to what extent several measurements of a particular variable provide similar results (Söderlund, 2018). Reliability was considered since all variables were measured using three items each according to the Marketing Scales Handbook (Bearden & Netemeyer, 1999). Cronbach’s Alpha was calculated for each variable and the results can be found in Appendix 3. Two of the five variables failed to

reach an acceptable level of 0.7 (Söderlund, 2018). One may argue that more items measuring a variable will increase Cronbach's Alpha. However, it was decided to rely solely on what it stated in the Marketing Scales Handbook (Bearden & Netemeyer, 1999) since Cronbach's Alpha has been significantly higher in previous studies. There are two possible explanations as to why the alpha scores observed in this study are different. First, the relatively small sample size of 123 participants could mean that outliers decrease Cronbach's Alpha more than what is observed in more thorough studies. Second, all of the items were translated into Swedish by the thesis authors, meaning that the items are not necessarily the exact same as in the handbook. This explanation is somewhat mitigated since both of the authors are native Swedish speakers and speak English fluently, so translation differences should be minimized.

## 4. Results

Two-Sample T-Tests for Unequal Variances were conducted, of which the mean scores are summarized in Table 1. The assumptions of this test are fulfilled, since the standard deviations of the two populations are unknown, and they are not assumed to be equal. The sample size is  $>30$ , which implies that the central limit theorem can be applied, assuming that data are normally distributed (Newbold, P., Carlson, W.L. & Thorne, B.M., 2020).

The results showed no significant differences in purchase intentions ( $p = .16$ ) between Stimulus 1 ( $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = 1.96$ ) and Stimulus 2 ( $M = 4.15$ ,  $SD = 1.81$ ), showing that **H1 is not supported**. Similarly, no significant differences in cognitive resource demands ( $p = .11$ ) between Stimulus 1 ( $M = 5.73$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ) and Stimulus 2 ( $M = 5.93$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ) were found, indicating that **H2 is not supported**. There was no significant increase in ad interest ( $p < .05$ ) in Stimulus 1 ( $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = 1.88$ ) compared to Stimulus 2 ( $M = 3.98$ ,  $SD = 1.80$ ), meaning that **H3 is not supported**. Worth noting is that the opposite hypothesis was proven to be empirically supported because Stimulus 2 obtained a significantly higher value of ad interest compared to Stimulus 1. Results do not show significant differences in ad memorability ( $p = .25$ ) between Stimulus 1 ( $M = 5.21$ ,  $SD = 1.66$ ) and Stimulus 2 ( $M = 5.08$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ), implying that **H4 is not supported**. Lastly, there were no significant increases in brand distinctiveness ( $p < .05$ ) between Stimulus 1 ( $M = 3.98$ ,  $SD = 2.62$ ) in comparison to Stimulus 2 ( $M = 5.35$ ,  $SD = 2.16$ ), suggesting that **H5 is not supported**. Once again, an opposite hypothesis could be empirically supported because Stimulus 2 obtained a significantly higher value of brand distinctiveness compared to Stimulus 1.

**Table 1.** A summary of the results of the two-sample t-test.

Variable	<u>Stimulus 1</u>		<u>Stimulus 2</u>		P-value	Hypothesis
	M	SD	M	SD		
Purchase Intentions <sup>a</sup>	3.89	1.96	4.15	1.81	.16	H1 not supported
Cognitive Resource Demands <sup>b</sup>	5.73	1.51	5.93	.99	.11	H2 not supported
Attitude Toward the Ad (Interesting) <sup>c</sup>	3.23	1.88	3.98	1.80	<.001	H3 not supported
Attitude Toward the Ad (Memorable) <sup>c</sup>	5.21	1.66	5.08	1.40	.25	H4 not supported
Brand Distinctiveness <sup>d</sup>	3.98	2.62	5.35	2.16	<.001	H5 not supported

Note: <sup>a</sup> 1 being unlikely, 7 being very likely.

<sup>b</sup> 1 being high demands, 7 being low demands

<sup>c</sup> 1 being completely disagree, 7 being completely agree

<sup>d</sup> 1 being completely disagree, 9 being completely agree

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Conclusions

The main findings of the study were that positive and significant changes in the perceived brand distinctiveness and ad interest can be observed in data collected from a survey when participants were exposed to marketing communication of toothpaste containing Donald Miller's (2017) elements relating to pre-established marketing techniques (Stimulus 2) as opposed to the elements containing novel storytelling techniques (Stimulus 1). These findings contradict current research and the hypotheses made. The study shows no significant changes in purchase intentions, cognitive resource demands, or ad memorability between the elements using storytelling techniques as opposed to elements with pre-established marketing techniques.

#### 5.1.1. Purchase Intentions

When a set of participants of a survey were exposed to Stimulus 1, no significant increase or decrease in purchase intentions was observed in the data compared to when another set of participants was exposed to Stimulus 2. Thus, H1 is not supported. This finding contradicts previous studies that concluded that calls to action in marketing communication should increase a customer's purchase intentions (Vafainia et al., 2019).

Unfortunately, this measure only received a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.32, which is to be considered low and the reliability should be questioned. When looking at the items measuring purchase intentions, it may be argued that the items themselves are measuring different levels of monetary commitment. The first item indicates no monetary commitment, while the second item indicates a monetary commitment, and the third item indicates a higher monetary commitment than usual (See Appendix 3 for the items used). Thus, one can argue that the same person is naturally likely to give the first item a higher value compared to the other two, and give the third item a lower value compared to the other two. Therefore, the low Alpha of 0.32 can be understood, and an encouragement can be made to investigate if a different source of the purchase intentions measure should be used in future research related to this study.

#### 5.1.2. Cognitive Resource Demands

Similarly, no significant increases or decreases in cognitive resource demands were found when comparing responses from participants being exposed to Stimulus 1 compared to Stimulus 2. Therefore, H2 is not supported. This contradicts previous studies regarding Narrative Theory, Customer Storytelling Theory, and studies on the

effects of brand stories in content marketing that would suggest that the ad with storytelling should decrease cognitive resource demands for the customer.

#### 5.1.3. Ad Interest

Narrative Theory, Customer Storytelling Theory, and studies on the effects of brand stories in content marketing would also suggest a positive impact on ad interest for participants exposed to storytelling in marketing communication. However, the data does not support this, as it shows no significant positive changes in ad interest when comparing participants being exposed to Stimulus 1 compared to participants being exposed to Stimulus 2, indicating that H3 is not supported. Instead, the data empirically supported the opposite hypothesis. Stimulus 2 received significantly higher levels of ad interest compared to Stimulus 1 (see Chapter 5.2 for possible explanations).

#### 5.1.4. Ad Memorability

Conflicting with Narrative Theory, Customer Storytelling Theory, and studies on the effects of brand stories in content marketing, the study did not find significant positive effects on ad memorability when participants were exposed to Miller's (2017) storytelling-related elements as opposed to the elements with pre-established marketing techniques. Consequently, H4 is not supported.

#### 5.1.5. Brand Distinctiveness

The data showed no significant positive differences in brand distinctiveness when participants were exposed to Stimulus 1 compared to Stimulus 2. This contradicts previous research on Narrative Theory, Customer Storytelling Theory, and studies on the effects of brand stories in content marketing, and consequently, the data does not support H5. The opposite hypothesis can, however, be empirically supported because Stimulus 2 obtained significantly higher values of brand distinctiveness compared to Stimulus 1 (see Chapter 5.2 for possible explanations).

## 5.2. General Discussion

None of the hypotheses could be empirically supported, and one may ask the question of why that is. One reason could be that Miller (2017) argues that his elements should be used over a long period of time to get effects, and simply exposing participants to a singular marketing communication may not show such long-term branding effects. Another general speculation is that participants might feel it is easier to understand and assess their interest in the ad and the distinctiveness of the brand since they both are simple opinions compared to more complex concepts such as memorability and cognitive resource demands. Therefore, they may have been able to estimate their ad

interest and brand distinctiveness more accurately than the other measures. Purchase intentions may also be difficult for a participant to estimate, especially for toothpaste since it is a product most people already have at home and is mostly purchased purely based on heuristics and routines. It may then be difficult to assess the purchase intentions for a product they do not care about. Chapter 3.2 explained further why toothpaste was nevertheless chosen as the most appropriate product to examine given the scope of this study.

Furthermore, it may be argued that a low-involvement and functional product such as toothpaste does not necessarily benefit from elaborate storytelling branding techniques because customers of toothpaste are not usually as influenced by emotions compared to high-involvement transformational products such as perfumes or watches. Instead, some argue that low-involvement and functional products should have marketing communication with clear statements about their functional benefit (Percy & Donovan, 1991). Indeed, Customer Storytelling Theory says that the lecture format of Stimulus 2 leads to argumentative thinking (Bruner, 1990; Schank, 1990), which once again might be beneficial for toothpaste as a low-involvement and functional product, while a drama format used in Stimulus 1 may be more appropriate and increase the memorability and information retrievability for high-involvement and transformational products. Thus, one can speculate that the result that ad interest is higher with Stimulus 2 compared to Stimulus 1 is motivated specifically by toothpaste as a product, but this study cannot say if all products are expected to have similar effects on ad interest.

The result that Stimulus 2 also obtained a significantly higher score of brand distinctiveness compared to Stimulus 1 could be because toothpaste ads normally do not include a transitional call to action or a process plan. Data showed empirical support for the fact that highlighting the risks of using the wrong kind of toothpaste and including a transitional call to action in combination with a process plan gives significantly higher levels of brand distinctiveness compared to an ad presenting the message using storytelling techniques. Once again, an argument could be made that being explicit about the risks and functional benefits of a low-involvement functional product is preferred which explains this result.

Even though only Stimulus 1 was designed to include storytelling techniques, it can be argued that the Protector archetype present in Stimulus 1 is also present, perhaps even more clearly, in Stimulus 2. Since Customer Storytelling Theory would argue that a message that allows the customer to experience a powerful archetype will increase the customer-brand relationships (Woodside et al., 2008), the reason why Stimulus 2

obtained a higher brand distinctiveness score than Stimulus 1 may be because Stimulus 2 better communicates an archetype.

There are two possible additional faults to consider - the stimuli could perhaps not be adequately representative of the different elements, and/or the survey itself could have been confusing to the participants. While this study did not conduct any pre-studies to get data on whether or not participants believed the two different stimuli to include the correct elements in a clear way, this study did include questions at the end of the survey relating to the perceived quality of the questions and the answer alternatives. These questions used a 7-point Likert-type scale. The results from the survey quality questions are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2.** A summary of the results of the survey quality questions.

Question	M	SD
1. The questions in this survey were clearly formulated (1-7)	5.97	1.15
2. The answer alternatives in this survey were clearly formulated (1-7)	6.21	1.03
3. I believe the questions tried to influence me to answer in a certain way (1-7)	2.83	1.97

The results from the survey quality questions showed that the participants generally believed that the survey had clearly formulated questions and answer alternatives, given by the high mean scores on questions 1 and 2. The results also show that participants did not generally believe that the questions tried to influence their answers one way or another, given by the low mean score on question 3. Furthermore, it is true that 17% of people dropped off while being exposed to either Stimulus 1 or Stimulus 2. However, because an equal amount of people dropped off after being exposed to Stimulus 1 as with Stimulus 2 (see Figure 1), one can argue that neither one of the stimuli were perceived as more troublesome to read. It can be argued as natural that 17% of people dropped out while reading the stimuli since it was the first sign of an effort being required to continue, and it may be understandable that some people did not want to put in that effort. Afterward, there is a natural dropoff as people go through the survey, and 79% completed the entire survey. Because no large amount of people left the survey at any point after being exposed to the stimuli, one can argue that no block was perceived as more troublesome than any other.

### 5.3. Theoretical and Managerial Implications

Given the conclusions from the survey data, it is clear that while the hypotheses are not supported, there are still some important findings from the results. Although no implications can be made on marketing in general, the implications for toothpaste ads specifically are that including a process plan and a transitional call to action, highlighting the risks of the purchase, and what the customer wants to transform into will lead to higher levels of brand distinctiveness and ad interest compared to an ad without such elements. However, including Donald Miller's (2017) novel storytelling techniques from the first three elements in a singular toothpaste ad is not likely to change the customer's purchase intentions, cognitive resource demands, or ad memorability. With this knowledge in mind, marketers could, and should, ensure that Miller's (2017) elements relating to pre-established marketing techniques are present in the formulated market communication of toothpaste in order to increase ad interest and brand distinctiveness.

The findings in this study are against the hypotheses made, but one may argue that the main reason why is due to the product chosen to be examined in the survey. While prior research has concluded that storytelling in general marketing communications should result in positive effects on the customer's interpretations and intentions, one can speculate that low-involvement and functional products may be an exception to these conclusions given the results from this study, indicating that marketers should first examine how and why customers purchase and use the company's products or services before using storytelling techniques in general marketing communication for those specific products or services.

Although no hypotheses were empirically supported by this study, sometimes, you learn more from failure than you do from success.

## 5.4. Limitations and Future Research

This study only considered Miller's (2017) method of using storytelling techniques in general marketing communications of a toothpaste ad. One may argue that such a low-involvement and functional product is not ideal to examine (Percy & Donovan, 1991), and it is encouraged for future research to examine effects across industries and include more transformational and high-involvement products. The online survey conveyed an artificial marketing communication message and the participants responded to the survey without having a real interest in purchasing toothpaste, meaning that only purchase intentions and not actual purchases were possible to examine. To find any real-world effects of using storytelling in general marketing, a real-world experiment could be performed, for example, by exposing real customers to different stimuli in a store. The long-term effects of using storytelling in marketing communication could also be of more scientific interest.

This study only found that Miller's (2017) last four elements with pre-established marketing techniques led to higher levels of ad interest and brand distinctiveness compared to the elements with storytelling techniques. It did not necessarily find that Miller's (2017) method generally increased ad interest or brand distinctiveness compared to using no method at all because the study only compared two distinct parts of Miller's (2017) method against each other. This limitation is somewhat taken into consideration when choosing how to divide Stimulus 1 and Stimulus 2, where Stimulus 1 made use of novel storytelling techniques while Stimulus 2 included a call to action and a process plan, two widely used techniques in marketing communication. However, it is still beneficial for future research to examine relevant measures for marketing communications without any of Miller's (2017) elements and compare them to marketing communications with all of Miller's (2017) elements.

While this study included one measure of attitude toward the brand, namely brand distinctiveness, other effects on the customer's perception of the brand would be interesting to analyze. Going back to Consumer Storytelling Theory, this study only focused on if the customer experienced the effects of storytelling in general marketing communication due to an archetype enactment (Woodside et al., 2008). Further research may be done on how the marketer can select the appropriate archetypes and how to include them in the most effective way for optimized results.

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## 7. Appendix

### 7.1. Appendix 1: Stimulus 1 and 2 (English Translated Version)

#### **Stimulus 1:**

Having confidence and a perfect white smile are both incredibly attractive traits, no matter if you meet a new date, friend, or business partner.

One main reason why most of us do not reach our full potential when it comes to those traits is that we continue to use the wrong toothpaste - a toothpaste that does not fit our specific teeth's needs.

Yellow teeth are never attractive, and don't we all know the feeling of not being happy with our smile. We have helped over 2 million people find the correct toothpaste for their specific teeth - because we believe that everyone deserves a confident smile!

#### **Stimulus 2:**

Many people today continue to buy the wrong kind of toothpaste. Since the usage of the wrong toothpaste can lead to caries, plaque, and teeth and gum-related diseases, you should do something about it.

We offer a quick and free online guide to determine the best toothpaste for your teeth to prevent these risks. Go to the link, answer the questions in the guide, order the suggested toothpaste and start to use the toothpaste twice a day as soon as it arrives in your mailbox!

Become the ultimate you and eliminate the anxiety by knowing that you take the right actions to avoid future dental problems: You get healthy teeth that last your entire life - and a smile that gives confidence!

## 7.2. Appendix 2: Stimulus 1 and 2 (Original Swedish Version)

### Stimulus 1:

Ett gott självförtroende och ett perfekt, bländande vitt leende är två oerhört attraktiva egenskaper- oavsett om du ska träffa din nya date, en kompis eller en affärsbekant.

En stor anledning till att de flesta av oss inte når vår fulla potential när det gäller dessa egenskaper är att vi fortsätter att använda fel tandkräm - en tandkräm som inte passar just våra tänderns behov.

Gula tänder är aldrig attraktivt, och vi alla känner väl igen känslan av att inte vara helt nöjda med vårt leende. Vi har hjälpt över 2 miljoner människor att hitta rätt tandkräm för just deras specifika behov - eftersom vi anser att alla förtjänar ett självsäkert leende!

### Stimulus 2:

Många människor idag fortsätter att köpa fel sorts tandkräm. Eftersom användandet av fel tandkräm kan leda till karies, plackbildning och tand- och tandkötsrelaterade sjukdomar, så behöver du göra något åt det.

Vi erbjuder en snabb och gratis online-guide för att bestämma vilken tandkräm som är bäst för dina tänder för att undvika dessa problem. Klicka in dig på länken, svara på frågorna i guiden, beställ den föreslagna tandkrämen och börja använd krämen två gånger om dagen så fort den dyker upp i din brevlåda!

Bli ditt ultimata jag och undvik oro genom att vara säker på att du gör det bästa för att undvika framtida tandproblem: Du får friska tänder som håller hela livet ut - och ett leende som ger självförtroende!

### 7.3. Appendix 3: Measures

#### Measures

Variable	Items measuring the variable	Endpoint labels	Source	Reliability
Purchase Intentions	How likely are you to try out the product in the ad? How likely are you to purchase the product in the ad? How likely are you to pay a higher price for the product in the ad?	Very unlikely/Very likely (1-7)	(Yang & Smith, 2009)	$\alpha=.32$
Cognitive Resource Demands	The ad message was:	Difficult to process/Easy to process (1-7) Difficult to understand/Easy to understand (1-7) Difficult to comprehend/Easy to comprehend (1-7)	(White & Peloza, 2009)	$\alpha=.73$
Attitude Toward the Ad (Interesting)	The ad was:	Interesting (1-7) Entertaining (1-7) Boring (1-7)	(Schweidel et al., 2006)	$\alpha=.70$

### Measures (continued)

Variable	Items measuring the variable	Endpoint labels	Source	Reliability
Attitude Toward the Ad (Memorable)	<p>I remember a lot about the ad message.</p> <p>The claims made in the ad were memorable.</p> <p>The ad message was easy to learn and remember.</p>	Completely disagree/Completely agree (1-7)	(Smith et al., 2008)	$\alpha=.62$
Brand Distinctiveness	<p>The brand is distinctive from other brands.</p> <p>The brand is different from other brands.</p> <p>The brand can be easily distinguished from other brands.</p>	Completely disagree/Completely agree (1-9)	(Zhou & Nakamoto, 2007)	$\alpha=.79$

*Note:* The survey used a version of each item translated into Swedish