

Celebrity Chefs as brand **and their cookbooks as marketing communications**

This paper discusses how consumers understand and interpret celebrity chefs as brands and utilise the cookbooks as marketing communications of the benefits and values of the brand. It explores the literature around the concept of celebrity, identifying it as something which is consciously created with commercial intent to such an extent that to suggest celebrities become brands is not hyperbole (Turner, 2004). It discusses the celebrity chef: how they are created and their identity as marketing objects (Byrne et al, 2003). It discusses common constructions of the meaning of cookbooks as historical and cultural artefacts and as merchandise sold on the strength of their associated celebrity's brand values (Brownlee & Hewer, 2007). The paper then discusses its findings against two research objectives: first to explore the meaning of celebrity chefs for consumers and second to suggest a mechanism of how this meaning is created. Using narrative analysis of qualitative interviews this paper suggests, that consumers understand and consume the celebrity chef brand in a more active and engaged way than traditional consumer goods brands can achieve. It also suggests, as a development from tradition views of cookbooks, that those written by the celebrity chef brands are acting as marketing communications for their brand values.

Defining Celebrity

Celebrity is much written about by social theorists (Marshall, 1997; Monaco, 1978) and as such there are many taxonomies of celebrity which Turner (2004) and discusses at some length in his work. Most interesting for this work is the concept of the Star (Monaco, 1978), fame is achieved when their public persona eclipses their professional profile in the ways of Elizabeth Hurley or Paris Hilton. Berh & Beeler- Norrholm (2006) suggest her brand is strong yet her fame is not based upon any particular activity, a celebrity they suggest in the purest sense of the word: well known for being well known. Turner (2004) argues that celebrity is rarely accidental rather it is consciously created by an industry looking for celebrity brands, a business similar to commercial consumer brand, managed with all the same care and skill. Rein et al (1997) discuss the celebrity as an industrial structure with among other elements: legal and business services, marketing and PR, and of course an endorsement industry.

It is ubiquitous that celebrities lend their image and reputation as endorsers of other brands and McCracken (1989) argues that this is a special instance of the general process of meaning transfer.

The Celebrity Chef

The celebrity chef is not uniquely modern, Kelly (2006) argues that Antonin Careme is the first celebrity chef in the late 18th Century. However Adema (2000) argues that the current batch of celebrity chefs have taken it to a new level. In the US Adema (2000) cites the growth of cable television, with special interest channels like the Food Network fuelling demand for home grown celebrity chefs like Emeril Lagasse and imported stars like Nigella Lawson. In the UK Lang & Heasman (2004) argues that growth is fuelled by an increased leisure time and disposable income making cooking or at least reading cookbooks the hobby of the middle class.

The path to celebrity chef is not homogeneous they may begin as food journalists like Delia Smith or Nigella Lawson, award winning chefs and restaurateur like Gordon Ramsay. However they achieve fame their ability to sell merchandise is well established as figure 1 demonstrates

with the celebrities on either side of the Atlantic having their own product lines from cookbooks to pasta sauces. Their power as endorsers has also been harnessed notably in the UK by Sainsbury utilising both Jamie Oliver and Delia Smith to enhance their reputation (J Sainsbury plc, 2008).

| Chef | TV Show | Product Lines |
|----------------|---|---|
| Nigella Lawson | Nigella Express, Forever Summer, Nigella Bites. | Cookbooks, Kitchenware |
| Jamie Oliver | The Naked Chef, Jamie's Kitchen, Jamie at Home | Cookbooks, Cookware, Serveware, Seasonings |
| Martha Stewart | From Martha's Kitchen, Martha Stewart Living | Cookbooks, Magazines, Housewares, Home Furnishing, Gardening Equipment |

Figure 1: Chefs of all Trades adapted from Facenda (2004)

The power of celebrity chef to create a run on brands mentioned in their TV show or books is also well documented with 'The Delia Effect' explaining the phenomenon where items mentioned soar in sales from cranberries and omelette pans (Smith, 2008a). Delia Smith has now taken that effect to the next level with her updating of the 1971 'How to cheat at Cooking' (Smith, 2008b) specifically endorsing the use of branded convenience products: Aunt Bessie Frozen Mashed Potato forming the basis for chapter 1 "Who peels potatoes? Anyone but you" and already reports emerge of these and other ingredients mentioned being in short supply (Press Association, 2008).

The celebrity cookbook.

Not all cookbooks are the product of a television series or the work of celebrity chefs and this research acknowledges that there are some used by consumers more as reference materials with basic cooking techniques or classic recipes and specialised texts dealing with cooking for children or vegetarianism, whose importance shifts depending on lifestyle and lifestage. For this study however it is those cookbooks written by the celebrity chef which are the focus. It is common to consider cookbooks as merchandise or products; part of that which accompanies the TV series. Like the Blockbuster movie which spawns a range of action figures so celebrity chefs use their books as the money-maker however they have also been attributed with deeper cultural significance: Mennell (1985), among others, discusses how cookbooks should be considered historical archive which illuminate our domestic history; and Brownlee, Hewer & Horne(2005:7) discuss them as cultural artifacts which contain "inscribed cultural tales which can be understood as productive of the culinary culture that they pretend only to display". This paper argues that beyond those readings of cookbooks they are behaving as marketing communications material for the celebrity chef brand.

Methodology

Situated within the interpretivist tradition this research is particularly based within narrative theory (Shankar & Goulding, 2001) and it seeks to explore consumer behaviour with particular focus upon consumption practices in food and cooking. Narrative analysis is argued by Wengraf (2001) to stand as a paradigm in its own right, Gergen & Gergen, (1988) argue that it is through narrative: the stories, accounts, tales and descriptions utilised in everyday speech, that meaning is created and understood. The data source of this paper is a qualitative enquiry comprising semi-

structured depth interviews conducted with 20 men and women in their early and mid thirties; all of whom had tertiary level education, were in full or part-time employment and who bore some responsibility for their household cooking. Narrative analysis of the transcribed interviews and a textual analysis of the cookbooks that respondents discussed have been synthesised with the research objectives of: first exploring the meaning of celebrity chefs for consumers; and second suggesting a mechanism of how this meaning is created. The research findings, against these objectives, suggest that beyond celebrity chefs being managed and created as brands that consumers understand and utilise them as such and that their books work as part of the communications mix for brand celebrity.

Findings

In discussing how consumers engage with celebrity chefs as brand it is first critical to make an attempt at defining the concept, as Miller & Muir (2004) discuss the term brand has become one of the most heavily used business lexicons but helpfully they also suggest five characteristics helpful in defining a brand. It is an interpretation of these that will be utilised in discussing celebrity chefs as brand. In discussing celebrity chefs this work will focus upon the 5 most widely recognised and discussed: Nigel Slater, Delia Smith, Nigella Lawson, Gordon Ramsay and Jamie Oliver.

Brand has Intangible Value

First Miller and Muir (2004) suggest that a brand creates an intangible value over and above the functional benefits of its products. Perhaps a tricky start since this requires the demonstration of an intangible, however this research can show that if the functional is to provide a guide to or education in cooking then the intangible value is demonstrated through the high awareness that consumers have of these chef brands and the enduring relationships which they have built with them.

When discussing with Jane aged 30 how she learned to cook she said:

“Mmm well obviously I live by cookery books because it’s the only way I would cook. Mmm well the one I go back to time and again is the Delia Smith, erm I’m just thinking about other ones I have and there’s loads but it’s the same few I use over and over Delia Smith and Jamie Oliver erm Delia Smith I tend to find that I can get what she is saying, whatever she is making. Well, I like Delia Smith.”

In this discussion Jane makes it clear that while she has bought a great number of books only a few can she recall or would make it into her repertoire of use and that is relatively enduring as a subset which she uses on multiple occasions.

Brand has Meaning to the Consumer

So it is key to look behind this intangible value to the more definable element which make a brand. The second of Miller & Muir’s (2004) to be discussed here is that a brand essentially exists within consumers minds as feelings and perceptions: that the brand has some meaning.

Michael 32 in discussing Nigel Slater’s brand meaning defines it thus:

“its about doing yourself justice, just because you don’t have long to make something or just because you can spend a lot of money on it doesn’t necessarily mean that you have to have something sort of tasteless or processed or particularly bad for you. So I like him and his approach to that and I suppose lots of people have cottoned on to that and now he’s quite instrumental in that whole movement of just eat something simple but you know

make it a good ingredient”

So in this discussion Michael has a very well defined view of, not just the type of cooking that Nigel Slater advocates, but that the brand message of doing yourself justice is clear and distinctive. Gordon Ramsay in contrast has a meaning of excellence, skill and experience.

“Erm but I do see myself as bit of an occasion cook, you know, I like time on the weekend to spend all day shopping for good stuff and I like Gordon Ramsay cause its classic but it teaches you new ways and once you know that’s it and its always dead impressive.”

Martin, 31

Brand is Consistent and Trusted

The third and fourth of Miller & Muir’s (2004) definitions of brand work in conjunction: that the brand must be consistent and that the consumer must be able to trust that brand. Both Nigella Lawson and Delia Smith inspire trust in consumers because the quality of their work is recognised, that effort has been expended perfecting recipes so they will never fail nor will the brand mislead by suggesting something easy which is not.

“Nigella because I love some of her recipes because they always work” *Simon, 33*

“I think her (Delia Smith’s) recipes are easier to follow and they taste good and when she says well this is quick and easy it is quick and easy” *Kathy, 30*

Jane 30, suggests that this trust is particularly important when faced with the unfamiliar, a subscriber to an organic box she is often faced with new vegetables and cannot rely upon her own experience of their taste so she turns to the familiar and trusted Delia brand to because her experience with that brand has always been positive and consistent.

“The Delia is great I mean it is straight forward and it’s easy to follow. Um so again things like fennel, never cooked with fennel until recently. So when fennel arrived I went around lots of different cook books and found, you know, different recipes but the Delia one I try cause her stuff always works.”

Brand is Motivating and Interesting

Finally Miller & Muir (2004) suggest that a brand should be motivating and interesting to consumers to persuade them to choose it over others. This is about more than just how appealing their recipes are, it is how consumers engage with their brand values Jamie Oliver (2000) for example has, with the respondents, a youthful, easygoing, sociable city lifestyle image which really appeals to some.

“I really like the Jamie Oliver thing of food for sharing and it doesn’t really matter what you’ve got, you know, if you haven’t got mustard it can be chilli instead. erm I think his stuff is quite, you know. What I like folk can come anytime and it’ll be fine cause you can make something dead quick.” *Fern, 31*

Like many brands however if there is a distinctive proposition it will not appeal to all consumers “used a bit of Jamie Oliver but I think kind of a lot of his stuff is pretty is kind of over rated it looks good it has that kind of really that would be a great lifestyle if I could just do that kind of thing but it is kind of lifestyle cooking rather than proper cooking I think. That is a little unfair but some of it you just think it doesn’t feel like a proper recipe.” *Scott, 33*

Despite this chef brands are much more engaging and memorable than those of traditional

consumer food brands. The respondents, while showing great depth of understanding of the values of the chef brands and considerable loyalty to them, found it difficult to think of more traditional brands that they really engaged with and while they could think of brands they bought often this was a largely unengaged process:

“I’d say quite a lot of Tropicana brands, I drink quite a lot of orange juice so that would be a brand that I’d be reasonably loyal to. We really like orange juice and I tend to buy Tropicana Orange Juice just through a process of probably elimination. Different you know trial and error, we quite like that orange juice so we buy that” *Paul, 32*

There also emerged narrative of brand rejection buying locally and from small producers where practicable as means of achieving quality. There was an acceptance of the supermarket as a necessity but there was little loyalty to them.

“it tends to be like the local Butchers, the Farmers Market em Delizique (local Deli) em and then the supermarket, but only because needs must. I’d probably bleat on about the fact that I hate supermarkets. Horrible kind of, you know you go into a horrible trance like state of, I just think they’re really deceptive and you know we you always spend quite a lot of money in them because you just end up buying loads of shit that you don’t need. I mean the Farmers Market is brilliant cause you, you know, its all good” *Anne, 33*

Cookbooks as marketing communications.

Marketing may have at its roots the concept of a commercial transfer, yet it has over time developed into a much more diverse discipline used across commercial and non-commercial organisations (Andreasen & Kotler, 2003) and with wider aims of building relationships with these more diverse customers. It is also readily accepted that the marketing communications toolkit is changing and expanding, with product websites now looking a little outdated and new opportunities such as blogs and social networking sites creating new challenges (Oser, 2004). That the packaging of a product may be part of the communications toolkit is well established so it is not a huge leap to consider the product itself having a communication role. In 2004 KitKat exploited this with equity building messages such as “Break before you snap” and the brand strapline “Have a Break, Have a KitKat” written on to the fingers of their bars. Simmons (2006) talks about the need to find ways of engaging with the consumer and so, while the cookbook’s function may seem to be as branded product, it also has a critical role to play in communicating that brand’s values and attributes and in retaining the customer by keeping brand Delia or Nigella as part of their repertoire.

By considering the text of the cookbooks the equity enhancing role emerges, considering Nigel Slater from Michael’s comment about his brand equity above the meaning is interpreted as being about cooking well everyday “to do yourself justice” and his book ‘Real Cooking’ (Slater, 1997) clearly communicates this:

“I passionately believe that anyone can make themselves something good to eat”, “good cooking real cooking is within the grasp of anyone with an appetite.” “We are not chefs chasing Michelin stars here- we are simply making ourselves something to eat” (Slater, 1997: 11)

This communication of equity is evident across the range of celebrity chef cookbooks as Jane’s comments among the many other suggest Delia Smith has equity of infallibility, tried and tested quality and in ‘Delia Smith’s Christmas’ (Smith, 1990) she communicates this not by constantly

striving for new recipes but by introducing one that stands the test of time.

“This with no apologies is a Christmas Cake that has been in print for 21 years, has been made and loved by thousands, one of the most popular recipes I’ve produced.” (Smith, 1990: 14)

Conclusion

This paper has suggested that, for the subset of chefs who attain celebrity, there is consumer behaviour which merits re-examination. That within a food marketing context these celebrity brands are dominant in trust, loyalty and the depth of knowledge consumers exhibit and that this success is eclipsing the brand building efforts of consumer goods brands and retailers. It also argues for a broad definition of the marketing communications toolkit and blurring of traditional distinctions of product, advertising and PR to acknowledge that items such as celebrity cookbooks can have multiple roles as branded merchandise and critically as one of the strongest marketing communications tools for the celebrity brand. Future work is needed to consider how more traditional brands can embrace new methods to drive consumer engagement and to re-examine traditional models of endorsement to ensure that rather than building the celebrity brand desired meaning transfer is enacted to the consumer goods or retailer.

References

- Adema Pauline (2000) “Vicarious consumption: food, television and the ambiguity of modernity” *Journal do American and Comparative Cultures* 23,3, 113-123
- Andreasen Alan & Kotler Philip (2003) *Strategic Marketing for non-profit organisations (6th Edn)* New Jersey: Prentice Hall
- Berh Alan & Beeler-Norrholm Andria (2006) “Fame, fortune and the occasional branding misstep: when good celebrities go bad” *Intellectual Property & technology Law Journal* 18,11, 6-11
- Brownlee Douglas, Hewer Paul and Horne Suzanne (2005) “Culinary Tourism: An exploratory reading of contemporary representations of cooking” *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 8,1, 7-26
- Brownlee Douglas, Hewer Paul (2007) “Prime Beef Cuts: Culinary Images for Thinking ‘Men’” *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 10, 3, 229-250
- Byrne Angela, Whitehead Maureen, Breen Steven (2003) “The naked truth of celebrity endorsement” *British Food Journal* 105, 4/5, 288-296
- Facenda Vanessa L (2004) “Chefs kick it up more than a notch” *Retail Merchandiser* February 41-42
- Gergen Kenneth & Gergen Mary (1988) “Narrative and the self as relationship” *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 21, 17-6
- J Sainsbury plc (2008) “Goals and Values: Making Sainsbury Great Again” <http://www.j-sainsbury.co.uk> (accessed 1/2/2008)
- Kelly Ian (2004) *Cooking for Kings: The Life of Antonin Carême, the First Celebrity Chef*. New York: Walker & Company
- Lang Tim & Heasman Michael (2004) *Food wars; the global battle for mouths, minds and markets* London: Earthscan
- Marshall P.David. (1997) *Celebrity and Power: fame in contemporary culture* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press
- McCracken Grant (1989) “Who is the celebrity endorser? Cultural foundations of the endorsement process” *Journal of Consumer Research* 16, 3, 310- 321

Mennell Stephen (1985) *All manners of food: eating and taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the present* Oxford: Blackwell

Miller Jon & Muir David (2004) *The Business of Brands* England: Wiley & Sons

Monaco James (1978) *Celebrity: the media as image makers* New York: Delta

Osser Kris (2004) "Nike Assays blog as marketing tool" *Advertising Age*, 75, 26

Press Association (2008) "Cooking Cheats snap up ingredients" www.pressassociation.co.uk/news (accessed 3/3/08)

Rein Irving J, Kotler Phillip, Stoller Martin R (1997) *High Visibility: The making and marketing of Professionals into Celebrities* London: Heinmann

Shankar Avi & Goulding Christina (2001) "Interpretive consumer research: two more contributions to theory and practice" *Qualitative market Research* 4,1,7

Simmons John (2006) *The invisible grail: how brands can use words to engage with audiences* London: Cyan

Slater Nigel (1997) *Real Cooking* London: Penguin

Smith David (2008a) Food suppliers poised to cash in on the new 'Delia effect' *The Observer Life and Style Supplement* February 10th

Smith Delia (2008b) *Delia's How to Cheat at Cooking* London: Ebury

Smith Delia (1990) *Delia Smith's Christmas* London: BBC Worldwide

Turner Graeme (2007) *Understanding Celebrity* London: Sage

Wengraf Tom (2001) *Qualitative Research Interviewing* London: Sage