Conversations with(in) the collective unconscious by consumers, brands, and relevant others ☆

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ABSTRACT

Jung's (2009) paintings of his dreams to enable conscious interpretation of his conversations within the collective unconscious informs a call for creating visual narrative art to inform meanings of personal and collective unconscious relating to stories consumers tell about buying and using brands. This study describes 13 conversations relevant to the study of conscious and the collective unconscious for consumer–brand relationships/communications. The 13 conversations' paradigm is useful for complementing the dominant logic by scholars of asking questions and relying on consumer conscious interpretations in their responses. The article advocates the use of multiple methods for both collecting and interpreting consumer–brand relationships, and illustrates the usage of storyboard-art of consumer–brand relationships in natural contexts. Brand strategy implications focus on the value of identifying how brands enable consumers to enact primal forces (archetypes).

The dominant logic in consumer research among scholars includes asking consumers questions that require them to retrieve beliefs (true/false), opinions (agree/disagree), attitudes (good/bad) and intentions (likely/unlikely) from their memories, organize and transform these retrieval into words or numerical answers, and usually edit, revise, and finally respond. While this entire process may require less than a second per answer, some combination occurs of partially automatic retrievals from unconscious memory and applying heuristics in working memory before the respondent utters words or ticks a box. The dominant logic includes the assumptions that consumers know themselves, are able to separate intentional from context-drive causes of their action, are willing to share this information with a researcher, can transform their beliefs, opinion, and attitudes into answers, and use metrics when answering the researcher's questions. Answering a question requires personal introspection. A respondent must interpret and evaluate what she thinks she knows and feels before answering. In short, consumers must have conversations with themselves to answer questions.

A host of personal and contextual factors affects retrieval ability, willingness to respond, and accuracy in answering a question.

Substantial evidence (Bargh and Chartrand, 1999; Wilson, 2002; Wilson et al., 1995; Wegner, 2002) supports Zaltman's (2003) the assertion, "Ninety-five percent of thinking takes place in our unconscious minds—that wonderful, if messy, stew of memories, emotions, thoughts, and other cognitive processes we're not aware of or that we can't articulate" (Zaltman, 2003, p. 9). Also, consumers are frequently nonconscious as to how contextual cues, including brand's prices and promotional claims, influence their evaluations and performance capabilities (Shiv et al., 2005).

Unfortunately, the following observations by Webb et al., 1966, (2000) are still accurate early in the 21st century.

> Today, the dominant mass of social science research is based on interviews and questionnaires. We lament this overdependence upon a single, fallible method. Interviews and questionnaires intrude as a foreign element into the social setting they would describe, they create as well as measure attitudes, they elicit atypical roles and responses, they are limited to those who are accessible and will cooperate, and the responses obtained are produced in part by dimensions of individual differences irrelevant to the topic at hand. *But the principal objection is that they are used alone.* No research method is without bias. Interviews and questionnaires must be supplemented by methods testing the same social science variables but having *different* methodological weaknesses. (Webb et al., 2000, pp. 1–2, italics in the original).

Rather than concluding that asking questions is a fool's errand, the present article suggests (1) consideration of a multiple-conversation paradigm for planning research designs, (2) more frequent applications of multiple tools to collect data from respondents, and (3) interpreting nonconscious information in consumer responses.

Following this introduction, Section 1 introduces 13 conversations relevant to consumer–brand interactions. Section 2 suggests creating visualizations of consumers' interpretations to surface personal and collective unconscious conversations by the consumer, brand, and relevant others. Section 3 concludes with implications for brand strategy with suggestions for research on consumer–brand conscious–unconscious conversations.

This article is unique and valuable in suggesting that psychoanalysis contributes to theory and method for understanding consumer–brand conversations (relationships) and can help increase the brand executives' effectiveness in nurturing attachment–love–rapture between consumers and her brand. Given the substantial evidence (Osnos, 2011) that psychoanalysis is out-of-favor as a basis for theory, method, and therapy in the early decades of the 21st century, the suggestion is a controversial stance and highly likely to be subject to ridicule. Because strategists can influence consumers to make choices without the consumers' conscious awareness of such influence (Ferraro, Bettman, & Chartrand, 2009), and even perform tasks objectively better or worse depending on which strategy the consumers experience while they are unconscious of such impacts (Shiv et al., 2005), powerful unconscious communications are possible without conscious awareness—a central proposition in Jung's writings before World War I (Jung, 2009). The conclusion and Jung's proposition support the request to withhold judgment for a few minutes and read on.
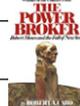
1. Thirteen conversations

Much of *The Red Book* (aka, *Liber Novus*, Jung, 2009) appears in various drafts between 1913 and 1995. In the book Jung presents a prototype of the individuation process which he held to be the universal form of individual psychological development. Much of the book focuses on Jung's reports of conversations that he accomplishes with the collective unconscious via surfacing his own unconscious thoughts and feelings via paintings. The collective unconscious includes the inherited collective psyche of primal forces that drive behavior unconsciously. The collective unconscious surfaces consciously in the fantasies and myths within cultures. Primal forces or archetypes in the collective unconscious express themselves as fantasy figures—frequently as protagonists in stories.

Table 1 includes the story gists and brand storylines for twelve archetypes. Jung proposes that archetypes stem from the layer of the psyche that is inherited and not simply idiosyncratic or arbitrary. He differentiates two layers of the unconscious. The first, the personal unconscious, consists in elements and stories acquired during one's lifetime, together with elements that could equally well be conscious. The second is the impersonal unconscious or collective psyche. Jung notes that differentiating between the personal and collective psyche is difficult. Woodside et al. (2008) and Wertime (2002) provides a full discussion of archetypal themes and brand storylines.

The collective unconscious contains the wisdom and experience of untold ages and thus represents an unparalleled guide for explaining the meaning of what is happening and what will happen. "Active imagination" and "self-experimentation" are terms Jung refers to in his use of paintings and sculpture to create dialogues between "directed thinking" (conscious thinking or what in the 21st century is

Table 1
Archetype, story gists, and brand examples.
Developed in part from several chapters in Weretime (2002).

Archetype		Story gist	Brand examples
Ultimate strength		When an obstacle is there, it must be overcome, strength must be proven in use.	Timex–"It takes a licking and keeps ticking".
The siren		Power of attraction, linked with the possibility of destruction	Allure by Chanel; Envy by Gucci
The hero		Fortitude, courage, and victory; a journey and transformation	Michael Jordan and Nike shoes; Joe DiMaggio and Mr. Coffee; Power Puff Girls; Forrest Gump
The anti-hero		Universal message of destruction and attraction of evil; the bad dude	Heavy metal icons; Howard Stern; Jerry Springer; Oakland Raiders; Che Guevara; Harley-Davidson
The creator		Creative inspiration and the potency of imagination; originality; authentic	Coca Cola–the real thing; Walt Disney; Kleenex
The change master		Transformation, self-improvement and self mastery	Curves–workout stores for women; Gillette's Mach 2 Razor; Porsche 911
The powerbroker		Authority, influence and domination–the world's leading -....; the best ...; number one	CNN; E.F. Hutton; Bill Gates; Microsoft
The wise old man		Experience, advice and heritage; staying the test of time	Levi's; Obi-Wan Kenobi
The loyalist		Trust, loyalty and reassurance	Coca Cola and "Mean" Joe Green with boy of 12 TV commercial; *I Love Lucy*; *Friends* TV sitcom
The mother of goodness		Purity, nourishment, and motherly warmth	Just Juice; Ivory Soap; Tropicana Orange Juice; Aunt Jemima; Fairy Godmother; Witch of the East; Snow White
The little trickster		Humor, non-conformity, and the element of surprise	Dennis the Menace; Bart Simpson; *Pee-Wee's Big*
The enigma		Mystery, suspense, and uncertainty	*Adventure*; *SpongeBob SquarePants* Zorro; Abercrombie and Fitch; Star Trek