BA Thesis – Disney Pixar short films in relation to branding, including branding through storytelling

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2 Introduction

In today’s globalised world, where everyone is trading with everyone, companies face the difficult task of differentiating themselves and their products from those of their competitors. To be able to survive and gain market shares the companies have a set of different tools they can make use of. One of them is branding, but what is branding and how is it used?

2.1 Problem statement

In my BA thesis, I have chosen to take a closer look at branding in relation to Disney Pixar Short Films. The reason for my choice is that in every Disney Pixar production a short film is given as a kind of introduction to the following film, however, the short film does not always relate to this film. Since the short film and the actual film seldom relate directly, it cannot be called a preview, which would otherwise have made sense for the company to employ. The short films must however serve some kind of purpose in relation to Disney. Since the films are fairy-tales they could be claimed to be storytelling and maybe even branding through storytelling.

On the basis of this, I wish to investigate what purpose Disney Pixar short films actually serve and if these could be said to be a kind of branding. This includes finding out whether or not these short films are examples of branding through storytelling.

2.2 Method

To determine whether or not Disney/Pixar Short films are a form of branding, I will go into detail with the definition of brands, branding and the ways to use it. Furthermore, a brief introduction to Disney, Pixar and the short films will be given, including history, image, vision and the core values, since this information is relevant to branding. Moreover, theory on storytelling is necessary in order to state whether or not the short films are examples of branding through storytelling.

In this paper I do not wish to evaluate neither the Disney branding process nor the effectiveness of such. Furthermore, I will not comment on the Disney company culture.
To be able to give a qualified answer to the problem statement of this thesis, I want to consult the following books: Neal & Strauss: Value Creation – The Power of Brand Equity; Fog, Budtz & Yakaboylu: Storytelling – Branding in Practice; Helder, Bredenlöw & Lautrup Nørgaard: Kommunikationsteori – En Grundbog; Kotler & Lane Keller: Marketing Management; Ouwersloot & Duncan: Integrated Marketing Communications; and Hatch & Schultz: Brug dit Brand and Marketing Management. For my analysis I also need two of the Disney/Pixar animated short films to confirm or deny my thesis statement. These will be “Boundin’” and “Partly Cloudy”. The two feature films that are connected with these short films will also be mentioned in order to show the almost “non-existent” relationship between them.

Finally, I intend to use the American Marketing Association website as a basis for the branding definition. Moreover, the homepages of Disney and Pixar respectively will be employed, as these are great sources to the company history, which I will look into as stated above.

3 Brands and branding

Branding is, as the name suggests, a concept designed to develop and promote a brand.

To clarify what branding is exactly, it is important to know what a brand is and why a firm would want to start a branding process in the first place.

3.1 What is a brand?

When talking about brands one must know that there exists two kinds; product brands and corporate brands. The difference between the two will be accounted for after a general definition of the concept.

One way of defining a brand is given by the American Marketing Association. “A name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers.” Or “A brand is a customer experience represented by a collection of images and ideas; often, it refers to a symbol such as a name, logo, slogan, and design scheme.”

2 Ibid
As Mary Jo Hatch and Majken Schultz suggest, these two definitions, which are more or less similar, tend to focus on the tangible attributes of the brand, even though a brand is in fact made up by much more than tangible attributes. In their opinion brands are represented by symbols.\(^3\)

Since a symbol is something that stands instead of something else, it has the power to lead thoughts from what is seen and onto another object or indeed subject. If what the symbols stand for relates to the customer, the customer is most likely to choose this symbol or brand over others.\(^4\) This is the reason why brands are so very valuable and why it is of utmost importance for the companies to build them.

Another definition of a brand is according to Bill Neal and Ron Strauss that a brand is an asset or liability that conveys values, value and meaning.\(^5\) This will explained in detail in the following sections.

Back in the days a brand often consisted of something tangible, which could be the producer’s name, place of origin or simply the quality of the product itself. This way, customers were able to distinguish between the different products or brands and buy the one they found best compared to the price.\(^6\)

Today, however, the market has become flooded with suppliers selling almost the exact same products, at the same prices and of the same quality. Because of that, it would be a difficult task to persuade consumers to be loyal towards one particular brand; if the different companies did not do anything more than add tangible value to their products. When speaking of tangible value today, logos, services, names, designers, etc. are referred to.\(^7\)

Therefore, the companies have the option of trying to add intangible value to their brands. Intangible value is the set of values that brands convey. Intangible value is supposed to make it easier to the consumers choosing among the numerous brands. Along with that the significance of merging value and values comes into play.

This is due to the fact that every individual contains values and wants to act in consistency with these values.\(^8\) Since brands help create meaning to the consumers through the values they convey, thereby causing them to act in consistency with them, they also generate value to the company. This is the purpose

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\(^3\) Hatch; Schultz, (2009), p.48  
\(^5\) Neal; Strauss, (2008), p.47  
\(^7\) Op.cit., 2008:49  
of brands; conveying the values of the company to the individuals, which if consistent to their own, cause them to act in favour of the company or said in another way; merge values and value.\(^9\)

As shown Neal and Strauss see brands as something that can contribute to the consumer’s decision making i.e. the distinguishing between products, the identity of the company, the understanding of the company and the motivation of both managers and employees.\(^10\) They suggest that a firm’s brand is the business or the strategy so to speak.\(^11\)

Furthermore, they suggest that brands can be divided into four types. These are; Authority Brands, which represent the producer and therefore also the producers values; Strategic Brands, which fit into a specific category; Operating Brands, which can be the same as strategic brands, however, for a specific product or service and Personal Brands, which describe individuals.\(^12\)

These four types are of course not absolute; but rather an attempt to split up brands, thereby making them easier to handle. These are also types that can be subordinated one of the two following terms – corporate brand and product brand.

### 3.1.1 Corporate brands

Corporate brands and product brands have a set of common features, which sometimes makes it hard to separate the one from the other; however, it is possible to do so.

Hatch and Schultz define corporate brands in the following way. First and foremost, a corporate brand is the company behind the brand. Secondly, it is the image and identity of the corporate brand. The first reflects how people perceive it and the latter how the company strives to be seen in the future.\(^13\) Thirdly, it is the culture of the company, then the shareholders, the consumers, the activities the firm engages in, its products – in short, everything.

Said in another way, a corporate brand is the company vision (ambitions for the future), culture (employees and the company values, traditions) and image (how customers and any other interested party look at the

\(^12\) Op.cit., 2008:63  
\(^13\) Helder; Bredenlöw; Lautrup Nørgaard, (2009), p.260
company). These three elements have to be cohesive i.e. act in consistency with each other, if a corporate brand is to be successful.\textsuperscript{14}

As it might appear, it is certainly not easy to reach the level where a company can call itself a corporate brand; not to mention, a successful corporate brand.

### 3.1.2 Product brands

In contrast to a corporate brand a product brand is according to Neal and Strauss a brand that exists under the corporate umbrella, which means that it may be closely aligned with the master/corporate brand. Though it is does not necessarily mean that it does so in every case.\textsuperscript{15}

A product brand can be a service or product, which is developed and marketed to a specific group of consumers. It will probably not have the same duration as a corporate brand, which exists as long as the company does. Neither does it need to adjust to or be consistent with all the values of the company the same way a corporate brand should, although it often does.\textsuperscript{16}

The reason why product brands do not always have to be reflecting all the exact same values the corporate brand does, is due to brand architecture and the fact that neither all product brands nor corporate brands benefit from being associated with each other.

If the corporate brand is very up-scale and driving on quality, uniqueness and luxury, it would be less wise to try to brand a new product on the same values or under the same name as the corporate brand. That is if the new product does not live up to the corporate brand standard. It would then have the opposite effect of what was intended and the corporate brand would be weakened at the same time. The company could instead try to create a new brand with little or no relation to the master brand.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} Hatch; Schultz, (2009), pp.28-34  
\textsuperscript{15} Neal; Strauss, (2008), p.59  
\textsuperscript{16} Hatch; Schultz, (2009), pp.28-34  
\textsuperscript{17} Neal; Strauss, (2008), pp.59-62
The advantage of a close relationship between a new product and the corporate brand, however, is of course the fact that if done in the right way, the new product may very well benefit from some of the same acknowledgement and positive reputation already established by the corporate brand.\(^\text{18}\)

Nevertheless, it is as referred to in the previous paragraphs important that the new product live up to the same standard as the master brand, since it will receive the hard judgement of the consumers immediately. They will simply stop buying the product, if it does not fulfil what it promised and the company, i.e. the corporate brand will subsequently lose credibility.

These definitions are more or less similar or at least they conclude the same; that brands are used as a way of differentiating similar products from each other as they are intangible assets that convey messages, symbols and meanings, which are crucial for the buyer’s decision making.

Philip Kotler, an acknowledged theorist, who is dominant in the marketing field, talks about the role of the brand and how important it is to have strong brands as these create brand loyalty. With brand loyalty the company cannot only rely on the customer to purchase the brand again, but also expect the customer to accept an increase in the price with up to 20-25%.\(^\text{19}\) This is invaluable.

Together with the facts written above it is hard to see how anyone could afford to spare creating a brand with the help of branding. So what is branding?

### 3.2 What is branding?

According to Kotler branding is a way of promoting one’s brand. He defines branding as “endowing products and services with the power of a brand”.\(^\text{20}\)

Branding is as stated used to promote a company brand, whether it is a corporate or a product one. It is through the branding process that a brand merges and creates the desired image. As Kotler points out creating a great image through branding is possible anywhere the consumer has a choice, which must be said to be more or less everywhere.\(^\text{21}\) This makes branding invaluable. Thus it is possible to conclude that

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\(^\text{18}\) Kotler; Lane Keller, (2009), p.298  
\(^\text{21}\) Ibid
branding is crucial for the differentiation of a company i.e. the position in consumers’ minds and thereby on the market.

When applying branding a firm will of course have some sort of strategy that suggests what elements should be emphasized in relation to the different brands. In addition to this, the firm will also have to make use of a branding process and when doing so it will have to keep several points in mind. That is to say of what a branding process consists.

According to Neal and Strauss branding is a process of understanding the values of the interested parties and how they combined with brand attributes, etc. create value for the company. Furthermore, it is defining a brand promise that can convey the mentioned values to shareholders, customers, employees, suppliers, media, etc.\(^\text{22}\)

As with brands, various forms of branding have been developed through time. A small number of them will be accounted for in the following sections.

### 3.2.1 Co-branding

Co-branding is when two different companies cooperate and combine two known brands. When combining two established brands customers may see the new product in an extremely advantageous light. It is, however, vital that consistency between the values of both brands is present, when the companies are to combine the two.\(^\text{23}\)

### 3.2.2 Umbrella branding

Umbrella branding is the opposite of what was once the most used way of branding. Before umbrella branding custom was to have one brand for every product and vice versa. Umbrella branding is as the name might suggest when a company use one specific brand to cover a series of related products. By doing that all 15 or maybe 60 products may benefit from this one established brand.\(^\text{24}\)

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\(^{22}\) Neal; Strauss, (2008), pp.177-179  
\(^{24}\) Helder; Bredenlöw; Lautrup Nørgaard, (2009), p.243-245
3.2.3 Internal branding

Internal branding is of the sort that is extremely important when commencing a branding process. To be able to send a convincing message to the consumers and all the rest of the people looking at the company from the outside, a company has to have order among all its internal organs. In other words the staff, etc. needs to believe in the brand in order to transmit it to the outside world in the best possible way. This is done through internal branding, which of course works the same way as external branding.25

3.2.4 Corporate branding and product branding

As we saw in the previous sections both corporate brands as well as product brands exist. Therefore it is obvious that both of these brands have different ways of branding themselves.

The difference between corporate branding and product branding is the same as seen earlier with corporate brands and product brands; when you brand corporate brands the branding concerns the whole company or the whole business and when you brand product brands the branding only concerns one specific product.26

When dealing with branding there is an aspect one cannot surpass and that is storytelling, including branding through storytelling. This is because of the fact that storytelling is very often used as a tool in branding. So what is storytelling exactly?

4 Storytelling

As stated in the beginning it is no longer enough to have a product of a certain quality, since the market is flooded with identical or at least similar products. Therefore, it is necessary for the companies to create brands and thereby differentiating themselves from their competitors.

Today, everyone, both companies as well as people in general use different brands to signal who they are. It could be that they use a specific kind of lipstick or clothes; drive a specific kind of car or live in a special kind of house. The reason why they choose precisely this brand instead of those of the numerous

25 Kotler; Lane Keller, (2009), p.289
26 Helder; Bredenlöw; Lautrup Nørgaard, (2009), p.243-245
competitors is because of the story attached to that brand. This means to say that whenever consumers choose one brand over another, it is because that brand can tell a story none of the others can.

This is what storytelling is about - telling stories that are able to define who we are.\(^{27}\) Through storytelling companies are able to build values into their brands. Values that appeal to consumers' emotions, who then buy the brand, thus displaying who they are to anyone who sees them.\(^{28}\)

Moreover, storytelling can be a great tool in not only in everyday communication, but also when it comes to knowledge sharing within a company. This is due to the fact that storytelling is able to deliver a complex problem in a simple and tangible way.\(^{29}\) Still, knowledge sharing is not the only thing storytelling can be a great tool in connection with.

Differentiating a company brand is as mentioned above done through branding and since storytelling can be used as a tool to create stories that can be incorporated in the branding, it can be concluded that “branding is the goal – storytelling is the means” just as Fog, Budtz and Yakaboylu do.\(^{30}\)

### 4.1 The four elements

Besides proposing that storytelling is an outstanding branding tool, Fog, Budtz and Yakaboylu also suggest that storytelling contains four elements, which are a message, a conflict, a number of characters and finally a plot.\(^{31}\)

The message is often a moral or indeed a positive statement that can be attached to the company in question. Furthermore, together with the whole story, the message will often reflect company values.\(^{32}\)

The conflict will then consist of either a conflict the company has overcome in reality or in fiction. Without a conflict, the company does not have a story, since nobody wants to hear a story that involves sheer harmony. There has to be an element of crisis, which when overcome will strengthen the company image.\(^{33}\)

\(^{27}\) Fog; Budtz; Yakaboylu, (2004), pp.14-22
The plot is how the story is structured i.e. in which order and point of time the events, characters and so forth have been chosen to be introduced in the story. Moreover, the plot will often contain a beginning, a middle and an ending, although this is not always so.\(^{34}\)

The characters in a story may best be illustrated by the fairy tale model below.

4.2 The fairy-tale model

In every classical fairy-tale there is a hero, who has a goal; an enemy or obstacle with the complete opposite goal of the hero; a benefactor and a beneficiary who both benefit from the hero reaching his/her goal; and a supporter who helps the hero in fulfilling his/her quest.\(^{35}\)

When converting this model to the business world the hero will be the brand or something that relates to the brand. The goal could be the company or brand vision i.e. the image it wants to obtain. The enemy could be either competitors or something that represents an obstacle for the hero. In most cases the benefactor will be the company behind the brand and then the beneficiary would be the consumer. The supporter could be the values that the brand possesses.\(^{36}\)

This is just an example of who could be the characters in a story. There are no fixed types of characters. In reality, only the imagination sets the boundaries.

Furthermore, the fairy-tale model may be applied not only in advertisements, but in all kinds of branding, internally as well externally as we saw with the knowledge sharing example earlier.

4.3 Branding through storytelling

When a company decides to use storytelling as a tool in connection with branding, it has to bear in mind the company values, since these values are what the core story consists of. The core story is the basis of the company, thus the values, however, without the story, these values could not be conveyed to the

\(^{34}\) Op.cit., 2004:42-44
\(^{36}\) Ibid
consumers in such a way that the consumers could understand them the right way. The story is the context that allows the values to make sense.\(^{37}\)

As the core story is the foundation it should be reflected in all the stories being told through both internal and external branding. Depending on how the company has chosen to align its product brands with the corporate brand they may share the same or be given individual core stories.\(^{38}\)

The core story can have various types of heroes and be incorporated into various types of fairy-tales. Fog, Budtz and Yakaboylu suggest that the stories should be ones that are well-known such as “The ugly duckling”, where the company starts out as an outsider, who nobody wants to play with, but then rises and becomes the one everyone wants to be around; and the “Hare and the tortoise”, where the company shows that by following traditions and a safe path it has come a long way, instead of trying to find a shortcut.\(^{39}^{40}\) Once settled on a core story and fairy-tale type, the company can use it successfully through its different branding stories over and over again.

To see this in a business relation, The Walt Disney Company will be included, moreover, Disney/Pixar short films. The purpose is then to find out whether or not Disney Pixar Short Films are in fact branding through storytelling. To be able to do that it is crucial to know their background i.e. the company behind the films. This background will be given on grounds of the company history as well as its stated vision, etc.

5 The Walt Disney Company

To start with the “mother ship” metaphorically speaking, The Walt Disney Company was founded in 1923 by Walter E. Disney and his brother Roy Disney. In the beginning the focus was on making cartoon series i.e. 8 minute films, which brought the star of all Disney characters to life in 1928 – Mickey Mouse.\(^{41}\)

With Mickey Mouse and “Steamboat Willie” the company was well on its way to making history and so it did. First in 1932 when the Oscars invented a special category for “Best Cartoon” where a Disney cartoon


\(^{40}\) Op.cit., 2004:164-165

\(^{41}\) Disney, History: [http://corporate.disney.go.com/corporate/complete_history_1.html](http://corporate.disney.go.com/corporate/complete_history_1.html) (12-04-10)
was the first to win and then again in 1937 when “Snow White and the 7 Dwarfs” was released as the first animated feature film in the world.\(^{42} 43\)

After this major breakthrough the company lay low for more or less a decade during the war, but then in the 50’s it was able to present its first live action film, a Disney television Christmas show and the Disneyland concept, which has managed to remain popular even in the ever changing time of the present.\(^ {44}\)

Walt Disney died in 1966, just after another Disney masterpiece was created; “Mary Poppins”. It was the first to combine live action, animatronics and animation on screen. Not long after, his brother and partner Roy Disney passed away as well. Nevertheless, even with another management the Disney Company continued to renew itself by e.g. initiating its own TV channel called Disney Channel, releasing Disney classics on cassette, opening Disney stores and continuing to produce animated feature films that amazed the world.\(^ {45}\)

Today, The Walt Disney Company is headed by Robert A. Iger and is defined as “an international family entertainment and media enterprise” which covers theme parks, resorts, consumer products, feature films both motion and animated, media networks, etc.\(^ {46} 47\)

Among people it is known as a firm which supplies high quality entertainment by creating magic on screen and though it has existed now for almost a century it seems as if the company still keeps in mind a sentence once uttered by the founder concerning Disneyland. He said that it would “never be completed as long as there is imagination left in this world”.\(^ {48}\) One could perhaps say the same thing about the company. It lives on the imagination of people and as long as it stays innovative, playful and open minded there will always be a space for it to fill out in the business.

Also the Walt Disney Company mission corresponds well with the overall picture of innovation, playfulness, etc. given through the history above. It is as stated on the corporate website: “...to be one of the world's leading producers and providers of entertainment and information. Using our portfolio of brands to

\(^{42}\) Ibid
\(^{44}\) Ibid
\(^{47}\) Disney, CEO: [http://corporate.disney.go.com/corporate/bios/robert_a_iger.html](http://corporate.disney.go.com/corporate/bios/robert_a_iger.html) (12-04-10)
differentiate our content, services and consumer products, we seek to develop the most creative, innovative and profitable entertainment experiences and related products in the world.”

From the history one could conclude that the Disney Company has tried to stay innovative all the way through history and done so with success. From the beginning where it was able to present the world’s first full-length animated feature film and up till now where Disney networks has become available on Apple’s iPod. Furthermore the purchase of Pixar Animation Studios has added renewal and even greater success to the company.

5.1 Disney’s core values

Disney’s core values have remained the same from the foundation of the company and up until today. These values are those of the founder, Walt Disney. Back in the days he formulated them as being imagination and wholesomeness, which the company still keeps a main focus on as it continue to supply imaginative stories with morals and happy endings.

On the grounds of these values and in consistency with them, the core purpose of The Walt Disney Company is “to make people happy”. This may very well also be the company vision as a core purpose is the foundation and most important reason to exist.

This set of values have worked so effectively within branding that the company could call itself the 8th biggest brand with a Disney brand value worth of $27,85 billons in 2006. A contributing factor to this high brand value is the way the company brands itself – the branding through its core story. This will be looked further into later in this thesis.

Since Pixar is now a part of The Walt Disney Company and a main figure, when it comes to the mentioned short films, a background of this company is needed as well. This will be given below.

50 Disney, History: http://corporate.disney.go.com/corporate/complete_history_7.html (17-04-10)
51 Hatch; Schultz, (2009), p.179
52 Ibid
53 Kotler; Lane Keller, (2009), p.293
5.2 Pixar Animation Studios

Disney is one of the greatest global brands existing, but even Disney needs to keep a sharp eye on competitors like e.g. Dream Works.\textsuperscript{54} One of the ways to keep in the game was to purchase the smaller company Pixar Animation Studios.\textsuperscript{55, 56}

In the 90’s the two companies had functioned as partners in creating such movie successes as “Finding Nemo” and “Monsters Inc.”. Therefore CEO Robert A. Iger pushed forward to buy Pixar in 2006.\textsuperscript{55, 56} This turned out to be a wise move, since this company is now a great asset to the Disney Company. With the purchase of Pixar Animation Studios, Disney has managed to stay innovative and on the top.

Through the Disney Company, which most people know from their childhood, Pixar Animation Studios has created a great position on the market. Before the two companies merged together or merely had a partnership, Pixar Animation Studios was not that well known among people. This does not strike anyone as odd; however, since the company had only existed for a few years, before the partnership with Disney.

Actually, it is a former Disney employee, John Lasseter, who holds the post as Pixar’s executive vice president in the company. It was, however, filmmaker George Lucas whom founded Pixar Animation Studios in 1986 together with Ed Catmull, who now sits as president in the company.\textsuperscript{57, 58}

Pixar is a company that specializes in 3D animation technology and creative storytelling. It has from day one been focused on producing the best products possible and with the help from Disney it has achieved to reach a level of excellence both technology wise and story wise.\textsuperscript{59} In the beginning the spotlight was on short films such as “Luxo Jr.” from 1986, but after the partnership with Disney commenced in 1991, feature films has been attended to an equal extent.\textsuperscript{60}

The two companies have created such memorable feature successes as “Toy Story”, “Finding Nemo” and “The Incredibles”. Notable short films have followed the popular feature films. Here it is possible to name

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{54} Ibid
\item \textsuperscript{55} Disney, History: \url{http://corporate.disney.go.com/corporate/complete_history_5.html} (12-04-10)
\item \textsuperscript{56} Pixar, Company overview: \url{http://www.pixar.com/companyinfo/about_us/overview.htm} (13-04-10)
\item \textsuperscript{57} Pixar, History: \url{http://www.pixar.com/companyinfo/history/1984.html} (13-04-10)
\item \textsuperscript{58} Op.cit.: \url{http://www.pixar.com/companyinfo/history/1986.html} (13-04-10)
\item \textsuperscript{59} Pixar, Company overview: \url{http://www.pixar.com/companyinfo/about_us/overview.htm} (13-04-10)
\item \textsuperscript{60} Pixar, History: \url{http://www.pixar.com/companyinfo/history/1991.html} (13-04-10)
\end{itemize}
films as “Mike’s new car” and “Boundin’”. As stated The Walt Disney Company acquired Pixar Animation Studios in 2006 and since then hits like “Ratatouille”, “Wall-E” and “Up” have seen the light.\(^1\)

Almost every year these films have had either a nomination or simply won an Academy Award, which is proof of outstanding co-operation.\(^2\)

### 5.2.1 Pixar’s core values

Having looked through the company history, it is easy to see that Pixar has an innovative profile and is one of the best in its field – 3D animation films. Furthermore, one may claim that Pixar’s company profile fits nicely into The Walt Disney family as they both seem to strive for being the best and renew themselves.

When that is said, the company values of both companies must also be more or less consistent to each other. Had they not, the two companies would probably not have initiated a partnership and much less agreed to a merger. On the basis of this, it is only the Disney core values that will be used for the analysis in the following paragraphs, where the short film concept will be explained as well.

### 6 What are short films?

Short films are as the designation might reveal, films, however, of a shorter length than normal feature films. Depending on the genre and location i.e. North America or Europe, these short films may have a duration of 1-45 minutes. Those of very short duration often derive from Europe, whereas the longer ones seem to be an American trademark. Furthermore shorts from Europe tend to focus on the plot and visual dramas, whereas the US tends to rely on the characters.\(^3\)

Short films can be used for several purposes. Some use them for documentaries, some as showcases for cinematographers and others for commercials.

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\(^1\) Pixar, Company overview: [http://www.pixar.com/companyinfo/about_us/overview.htm](http://www.pixar.com/companyinfo/about_us/overview.htm) (13-04-10)

\(^2\) Ibid

An example of the latter can be found with the BMW Company, which between 2002 and 2005 launched a series of short films on their website, as a way of promoting its brand. The short films were directed by real directors i.e. Ang Lee, Tony Scott, Guy Ritchie, etc. and stared by real actors i.e. Clive Owen.\textsuperscript{64}

The shorts were meant to lure the customers in by the means of interactivity and at the same time restore the BMW image and so they did. In 2005 over 100,000 viewers had visited the website to see these films. Even though not all could have been potential customers, there can be no doubt that this is an example of effective promotion and image improvement.\textsuperscript{65}

For this creative and bold performance, BMW received a nomination at the international Cannes Film Festival and won. Thus one must conclude that this initiative and these films was an advanced form of advertising or indeed branding.\textsuperscript{66}

As said short films can be used for different purposes and the BMW example is just one among many. Short films can also “just” be a product in itself; however, the following two examples plus analysis are supposed to show branding or more specifically branding through storytelling in relation to Disney/Pixar short films.

These two animated shorts are some of the newest and most popular from Disney/Pixar. The first one, “Boundin’” from 2004, has been launched together with the animated feature film “The Incredibles”, which deals with superheroes and their problem of fitting in.\textsuperscript{67}

The second one, “Partly Cloudy” from 2009, was launched in connection to the animated feature “UP”, which is the story of adventure and friendship between an old man and a boy.\textsuperscript{68}

\textbf{6.1 “Boundin’”}

“Boundin’” is the story of a lamb, who lives on a high mountain plain and whose wool is so fantastically shiny and white that it causes him to glance at himself in the water for several minutes. He is so proud that he breaks out in a tap dance, which enchants his neighbours and causes them to join him in his dancing.\textsuperscript{69}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{64} Ouwersloot; Duncan, (2008), pp.226-227
\item \textsuperscript{65} Ibid
\item \textsuperscript{66} Ibid
\item \textsuperscript{67} Disney; Pixar, (2004), The Incredibles
\item \textsuperscript{68} Disney; Pixar, (2009), UP
\end{itemize}
Everything is good until the day when a truck arrives, hauls away the lamb and shaves off his fabulous wool. The farmer throws him back all bare, naked and pink. Now the lamb is sad as his wool is gone along with his pride and self-confidence. His friends find him funny looking and laugh at him.  

Fortunately, a jackalope (a rabbit with the horns of a deer, who supposedly goes for a wise man among animals) passes the lamb and takes a minute to listen to the lamb’s story. Having heard the story, the jackalope shows the lamb that neither colour nor shape or size matters when it comes to dancing, making friends or indeed pursuing happiness. It is the inside that counts. The important thing is to be you; accept and love yourself. Then others will do too.

From then on the lamb cheerfully jumps around; regain his confidence as well as his friends and lives happily ever after.

6.1.1 “Boundin’” in relation to the four elements and the fairy-tale model

Now that the story has been explained and the plot revealed, it is possible to determine the message, the conflict and the characters of the story.

Firstly, the message must be that it is the inside of a person that counts and when you learn to be yourself, people will love you for whom you are. This is based on the lamb’s development through the story. At first he seems happy and everyone admires him because of his look, but then turns their backs on him, when he loses both his looks and along with it, his self-esteem. Fortunately, he discovers that he is still the same beautiful person inside that he has always been, looks or not. As he realises this, his admirers return and everyone lives happily ever after.

Secondly, the conflict, which here interferes with an otherwise idyllic picture, shows itself when the lamb is hauled away, shaved and thrown back into the rain all naked and bare. As said the lamb loses his wool, his pride, his friends and everything seems hopeless.

70 Ibid
72 Fog; Budtz; Yakaboylu, (2004), pp.30-32
73 Disney; Pixar, (2004), Boundin’
74 Fog; Budtz; Yakaboylu, (2004), pp.32-36
Finally, there are the characters of the story. To determine which character is played by whom, the fairy-tale model will be applied.\textsuperscript{75}

Starting with the hero, this character must be played by the jackalope, as the jackalope helps our main character (the lamb) regain his self-esteem by teaching him to believe in himself, love himself and be himself. Thus the hero’s goal is to help the lamb overcome the obstacle, so that harmony will be restored.

As support the jackalope can draw on his wit and experience in connection with life. He is aware that life has its ups and downs; however, he also knows how to handle them. As the song says “in this world there are ups and downs; so nice to know there are jackalopes around”.\textsuperscript{76}

The benefactor and the beneficiary are one and the same character in this story – the lamb. He overcomes his problem and becomes happy with the help of his friend and hero; the jackalope.

Last but not least, the adversary is the farmer who hauls the lamb away and shaves off his wool, thereby threatening the harmony of the story. The fact that the lamb’s friends or admirers turn on him when he loses his wool makes them adversaries as well, since they partake in what must be said to be the chaos of the story.

\section*{6.2 “Partly Cloudy”}
“Partly Cloudy” takes place up in the sky among the clouds. Here the cloud people sculpt babies and bring them to life, whereupon the storks deliver the babies to their parents.\textsuperscript{77}

One of the clouds, Gus, a grey cloud who specialises in creating dangerous animal babies such as crocodiles, sharks and porcupines, is a bit insecure and fears that his loyal friend and delivery stork, Peck, is growing wearied from all the danger Gus’ babies expose him to. Gus has seen his friend glancing at the other clouds with a smile on his face as they play around with the cute and cuddly babies they sculpt. This makes him sad, but he tries to ignore it and does his best to sculpt babies that Peck will like.\textsuperscript{78}

\begin{flushleft}
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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{75} Op.cit., 2004:36-42
\item \textsuperscript{76} Disney; Pixar, (2004), Boundin’
\item \textsuperscript{77} Pixar, Partly Cloudy: \url{http://www.pixar.com/shorts/pc/2.html} (19-04-10)
\item \textsuperscript{78} Op.cit.: \url{http://www.pixar.com/shorts/pc/3.html} (19-04-10)
\end{itemize}
\end{flushleft}
One day, however, when Gus proudly presents Peck with a baby shark, Peck takes off to a neighbour cloud, leaving Gus alone and saddened by the situation. He watches his friend talk to the other cloud, after which the stork receives a small bundle of cloth and flies away. Gus becomes furious at first, but then burst into tears.\(^79\)

Then the most amazing thing happens. Peck returns and unwraps the bundle in front of Gus. To Gus’ surprise it is not a baby, but football equipment for Peck to use as protection, when he delivers the dangerous babies. Gus’ realises that good friends will walk through fire for one another, so the two mates embrace and everything ends happily.\(^80\)

### 6.2.1 “Partly Cloudy” in relation to the four elements and the fairy-tale model

As with “Boundin’” the plot has been explained in the above and from that it is possible to decide the message, conflict and characters, which will be done in the following.

The message in “Partly Cloudy” is that true friends are worth their weight in gold, since they will do anything for each other. This message rests on the fact that no matter how dangerous it gets for Peck, he still stays with Gus as his loyal delivery stork. Peck just overcomes the problem by getting some football gear for protection. This shows that he would rather endure physical pain and come up with bright solutions to the problem than hurt his friend.\(^81\) \(^82\)

The conflict in this story is the danger that Peck is exposed to, i.e. the babies Gus sculpts, but also the dilemma the danger puts him in. How can he protect himself from these babies, without hurting his friend’s feelings? As this interferes with the harmony in the story, this must be the conflict.\(^83\)

Regarding the characters, they may once again be found by the means of the fairy-tale model.\(^84\)

The hero in “Partly Cloudy” is the one with a goal; the one with a problem to solve. Therefore it is bound to be Peck, who faces the challenge of avoiding pain and at the same time being true to his friend. As a hero

\(^79\) Disney; Pixar, (2004), Boundin’
\(^80\) Ibid
\(^81\) Fog; Budtz; Yakaboylu, (2004), pp.30-32
\(^82\) Disney; Pixar, (2009), Partly Cloudy
\(^83\) Fog; Budtz; Yakaboylu, (2004), pp.32-36
\(^84\) Op.cit., 2004:36-42
his goal is to overcome the before mentioned challenge or obstacle, so that harmony may be restored. He does this by getting himself a kind of “armour”, so that he may continue delivering the dangerous babies and thereby make Gus happy.

Peck’s support is the neighbour cloud that sculpts the football gear for him. The gear is the means to reach the goal, so one could say that the football equipment is a sort of support as well.

The benefactor and beneficiary is like in “Boundin’” the same person. In this story it is Gus, who gets to keep his best friend as a result of Peck’s efforts. Peck can also be said to be the beneficiary as his actions permit him to keep his best friend as well.

Finally, as stated earlier in connection with the conflict, the adversary in this fairy-tale is the danger and the dilemma it puts the hero in. The danger factor interrupts the otherwise perfect friendship and without a solution to the problem the friendship cannot last.

To be able to properly see the connection between Disney/Pixar short films, the brand and branding through storytelling, an analysis of Disney’s core story has to given. This will be done by the means of the four elements in a story including the fairy-tale model.

7 Disney’s fairy-tale model
Returning to the Disney Company and the core values, which were explained under the “core values” section, it is possible to determine what kind of core story the company has. A suggestion to what core story Disney possesses will be given in the following.

As a start the characters of the Disney story could be found by employing Disney and its core values into the fairy-tale model. Naturally, Disney would be the hero of the story, since the purpose of a core story is to promote the brand in question and furthermore signal what kind of brand it is.

In the light of who the core story is promoting, through the hero character, the hero in this story must be Disney, who as the hero “saves the day” and is the one the audience sympathises with. One could also say

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85 Neal; Strauss, (2008), p.179
86 Fog; Budtz; Yakaboylu, (2004), pp.36-42
that the hero is Walt Disney, who as the visionary founder has decided what kind of company Disney should be and who is indeed a front figure of the company even though he is dead.

No matter if the hero is Disney or Walt Disney, the goal is the same. The goal is the vision; “to make people happy”. 88

To reach this goal the hero has the power of imagination and as support the idea or feeling of wholesomeness and happiness, which people would like to have. This hero also draws on knowledge, i.e. his/hers knowledge about universal truths.

The beneficiaries are the people, who has lost the feeling of wholesomeness/happiness and who has difficulty in finding it again. Then the benefactor must be the Disney Company, which benefits from the happiness and loyalty of the beneficiaries, caused by the actions of the hero.

The adversary or enemy in the story is the lack of happiness in people’s lives.

Having determined the characters in Disney’s core story, one could go on to establishing the three remaining elements.

The message in Disney’s core story must be one that involves how Disney “makes people happy”. 89 This could be illustrated through certain morals such as “smile at the world and it will smile back at you” and “treat others as you want to be treated”, etc., which in some ways are universal truths; morals that could lead to happiness, if people live their lives according to them. Disney is then the figure in the story that teaches or proves these morals, thereby making the characters happy. 90

The conflict is the disruptive element in the story and will in relation to Disney always have something to do with the main character losing his/hers feeling of happiness and indeed wholesomeness as the goal of the Disney hero is to restore this and “make people happy”. 91

On the grounds of the characters, message and conflict it is possible to establish that the plot in the Disney core story may vary from story to story, however, it will always end with a happy ending provided by the hero, who brings happiness to the people and restores harmony.

88 Neal; Strauss, (2008), p.179
89 Ibid
90 Fog; Budtz; Yakaboylu, (2004), pp.30-32
7.1 “Boundin’” in relation to Disney

Seen in relation to business, Disney’s core story may be incorporated into “Boundin’”. Along with the Disney core story, the fairy-tale model as well as the four elements of a story will again be applied as a tool to show this.92 93

As established on page 20 the hero in “Boundin’” is the jackalope, since this character helps the main character (the lamb) regain happiness. If this is compared with the hero in Disney’s core story, Disney could very well be the jackalope, since they more or less have the same goal – to help people be happy. They also have a very important characteristic in common and that is the fact that both seem to act as teachers to the main character in the story. The lamb then symbols the people who has lost happiness and who needs help to regain it.

In both stories the hero is supported by his/hers attributes, which in this case is his knowledge about life or even his/hers knowledge about how universal truths seem to be true. This is his/her basis for teaching them to others. When learned, they may contribute to being happy and this is as stated the hero’s goal.

The enemy in both stories also seem to be of the same sort. As all adversaries they interrupt an otherwise idyllic setting and both does so by threatening to deprive someone of their wholesomeness/happiness. In “Boundin’” it is the farmer and the lamb’s admirers, which in connection with Disney could symbol anything that have an unfortunate effect on people in terms of happiness.

The beneficiary in “Boundin’” is the lamb and as the lamb symbols people when transferred to Disney’s core story, they must be the beneficiaries in the real life. The benefactor in “Boundin’” is as written on page 20 the same as the beneficiary; however, it could also be the jackalope, who benefits from having “saved the day” as the lamb now sees the jackalope in a positive light. This fits very well with Disney’s core story, since the benefactor here is the same as the hero.

Moving on to the other three elements, the plot in “Boundin” does not need any further explanation than what is given on page 18-19. In relation to Disney, this plot seems to be cohesive with the kind of plot it would be demanding when using its core story - an idyllic beginning; a conflict, which threatens the main

92 Neal; Strauss, (2008), p.179
93 Fog; Budtz; Yakaboylu, (2004), pp.36-42
character’s happiness; a hero, who acts in correspondence with the values of Disney and then using these to secure a happy ending.\textsuperscript{94}

The conflicts in both stories can likewise be combined as these conflicts threaten to deprive the main character’s feeling of wholesomeness and thus happiness.\textsuperscript{95}

The messages of both stories are possible to connect to one another as well. They involve a moral or a universal truth so to speak, which is supposed to help this person feel wholesome and thereby become happy. Furthermore, the message reflects positively upon the hero. This means that the audience receives the notion that Disney could help them be happy just as the jackalope does.\textsuperscript{96}

Whether or not these facts are likewise applicable in relation to the second short film, “Partly Cloudy”, will be discovered below.

7.2 “Partly Cloudy” in relation to Disney

On page 22 the hero of “Partly Cloudy” is suggested to be the delivery stork and loyal friend, Peck, whose dangerous job threatens his relationship with his best friend, the grey cloud, Gus. Peck solves this problem by getting football equipment as protection, thereby securing his friendship with Gus and avoiding that Gus should be hurt.\textsuperscript{97} According to the fairy-tale model and Disney’s core values, Disney may nicely fit into this hero character, as Peck helps Gus regain happiness and at the same time teach him a valuable lesson – good friends will do anything for you.\textsuperscript{98} Gus symbols people and just as Peck, Disney wants to “make people happy”, thus they have correspondent goals.\textsuperscript{99}

Peck is a hero who holds a teachers role, since he proves to Gus that friends never leave each other and as with “Boundin’”, Disney shares this characteristic with him. Even though the teaching role is not as salient in “Partly Cloudy” as in “Boundin’”, it is still a teaching role, as a lesson is learned and a moral proved.

\textsuperscript{94} Fog; Budtz; Yakaboylu, (2004), pp.42-44  
\textsuperscript{96} Op.cit., 2004:30-32  
\textsuperscript{97} Disney; Pixar, (2009), Partly Cloudy  
\textsuperscript{98} Fog; Budtz; Yakaboylu, (2004), pp.36-42  
\textsuperscript{99} Neal; Strauss, (2008), p.179
Both heroes draw on their knowledge about universal truths as support. In this case it is that good friends will do anything for each other. Peck knows this and is therefore compelled to find a solution to his dilemma, so that he can reach his goal, which is to secure happiness and wholesomeness.

In “Partly Cloudy” the adversary is as explained earlier the danger, which can be seen as an obstacle for the friendship and indeed happiness of the characters. As with “Boundin” this adversary fits well into Disney’s core story.

Once again the beneficiary of the story is Gus or in fact the people, who learns a valuable lesson and who is helped in finding the happiness, which they might have lost, because of the enemy. The benefactor is then Peck, who also gets to keep his friend and who is looked upon positively by the audience. Again the benefactor and hero is the same character in both this story as well as Disney’s core story. Therefore one could say that Peck symbols Disney. If Peck symbols Disney, Disney is the one this story reflects positively upon. This fits well with the purpose of Disney core story, which is to promote Disney.

Having established the relationship between the characters of Disney’s core story and those of “Partly Cloudy”, the time has come to look at the three remaining elements of this story in relation to Disney.

The plot does not need further explanation than what is written on page 20-21. It corresponds to what Disney would expect of a plot, which was to have Disney’s core story incorporated, as it possesses the same elements as did “Boundin”.

The conflict has to do with losing a friendship due to a danger that might succeed in separating the two friends. If the two friends do not overcome this obstacle they will lose their feeling of wholesomeness and thus their happiness. As Disney’s core story contain the same kind of conflict, the two stories match nicely.\(^\text{100}\)

The message and moral is here that true friends will do anything for each other and you can always count on them. This may be said to be a universal truth, which makes the message suitable to function as a message in Disney’s core story. Moreover, it reflects positively on the hero of the story, which therefore makes it even more suitable for Disney to use.\(^\text{101}\)

\(^{100}\) Fog; Budtz; Yakaboylu, (2004), pp.32-36  
\(^{101}\) Op.cit., 2004:30-32
Now that both short films have been proven to have a connection to Disney’s core story, it is possible to determine whether or not these could be said to be branding. This is what the following paragraphs will be dealing with.

8 Are Disney/Pixar short films branding?

From the analysis above it is as stated possible to conclude that a relationship between Disney’s core story and the stories of both “Boundin’” and “Party Cloudy” exists. Since these stories can be linked and indeed be said to be consistent with each other, it may likewise be possible to conclude that this is a form of storytelling.

As seen on page 10-11, storytelling deals with telling stories and is often used as a tool in branding to convey the values and messages of the company or product behind the branding. To use storytelling the company must create a core story that can be incorporated into e.g. a commercial, an advertisement or maybe even a short film.

Since the two short films most definitely may have Disney’s core story incorporated, they can be said to be examples of storytelling, however, are they examples of branding as well? The answer to that question can be found if one returns to what purpose branding has and how it functions through storytelling.

On page 8 Kotler suggests that branding is a process that endows the company products with the power of a brand. This means that branding promotes a company product or the company itself as a brand i.e. makes it unique. By doing that people are able to choose what they think matches their personality best. Branded the right way, the brand can create customer loyalty and thereby value for the company.

Furthermore, if the company combines branding with storytelling it tends to have a great effect on customers, as the values and messages are easier to perceive and understand through a simple story. The important thing is that the branding reflects positively on the brand it is promoting.

Returning to Disney and the way this brand is reflected in the short films, it may be called branding through storytelling if based on what is written above. In the short films Disney stands out as the hero of the story that makes people happy or at least tries to do so. Consequently, the Disney brand is promoted in a positive way, which means that value is added to the brand.
This leads one to conclude that the short films may actually function as branding through storytelling, as these films fulfill the purpose of such process.

It may on the other hand be argued that Disney/Pixar short films are merely products as is any other feature film produced by the company.

This could be true as these are now sold in shops all over the world as if they were feature films. However, they are not sold separately, but together as a collection of short films.\(^{102}\) If a customer wants only one of them, say “Partly Cloudy”, he or she will have to buy the feature film it has been launched together with, which in this case is “UP”.\(^{103}\)

This indicates that these shorts are not produced in order to be sold, marketed or indeed treated as regular Disney productions. On the contrary it could be argued that even though these films are products by virtue of the fact that they are short films, which are not showed on television as commercials, they still function as branding through storytelling to Disney.

This is due to the fact that only few customers buy the short films solely from an interest in them instead of in the animated feature film they are normally sold together with. On these grounds one cannot equal them with Disney’s other products. Instead they could be called additional products to the feature films they accompany or maybe even branding to these features. As to why they are now sold as a collection it could be argued that as branding products they have become so popular that a demand for them has arisen.

The reason why it is possible to call them branding to the features and still argue that they indeed function as branding through storytelling to the Disney brand, is that also the animated feature films bear in them the Disney values. Even though Disney/Pixar short films and the animated features do not always relate directly using the same characters, etc., they still convey the same values of wholesomeness and happiness.

Furthermore, it is noted that the short films and the animated films deal with some of the same subjects although it happens in completely different settings. In “Boundin’” it is about trying to fit in even though

\(^{102}\) Disney; Pixar, (2007), Pixar Short Films Collection
\(^{103}\) Disney; Pixar, (2009), UP
you are different and only when you accept yourself, you will be happy.\textsuperscript{104} This goes for “The Incredibles” as well.\textsuperscript{105} “Partly Cloudy” deals with friendship and so does “UP”.\textsuperscript{106 107}

In the end the answer as to what purpose Disney/Pixar short films serve is discussable as it is subtle arguments that determine it. Nevertheless, the arguments in favour of Disney/Pixar short films functioning as branding through storytelling to the Disney brand, thereby serving the purpose of promoting this brand, is the ones, which are assumed to weigh heaviest. Consequently, this leads to the question of what type of branding these short films are. An answer to this question will be suggested below.

\section*{8.1 What kind of branding?}

If it assumed that these Disney/Pixar short films are examples of branding through storytelling, then what type of branding is it i.e. corporate or product branding?

If we return to the examples of branding types given on page 9-10 one of these may be the right type. Starting with umbrella branding, this could not be it, as it is most often used to brand a whole set of products under the same name. These short films seem to brand Disney to a greater extent than just a set of company products, as they convey Disney’s core values, this is not the kind of branding this thesis concerns.

As to whether or not these short films could be said to be co-branding, it could be argued that it is, as the Disney and Pixar in the beginning were to individual companies that joined forces and created products bearing both names; however, since Disney bought Pixar in 2006 making Pixar part of Disney, this does not seem to prove correct.

Another type which seems possible to rule out is product branding. Product branding is in accordance with product brands branding that only concerns one specific product. The Disney brand covers numerous sorts of products as well as the whole company, so this type cannot be the right one.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{104} Disney; Pixar, (2004), Boundin’
\textsuperscript{105} Disney; Pixar, (2004), The Incredibles
\textsuperscript{106} Disney; Pixar, (2009), Partly Cloudy
\textsuperscript{107} Disney; Pixar, (2009), UP
\end{flushleft}
If these animated short films may not be any of the types above, they may very well be examples of corporate branding i.e. corporate branding of the Disney brand through storytelling. Corporate branding is as mentioned on page 10 branding that concerns the whole business including company, products and any interested party, i.e. everything. Since these films drive on the Disney core values, which were established earlier, they must fall into this category. Furthermore, this films may also be used as internal branding in the company as they demonstrate the company values to e.g. employees through simple stories.

On basis of what has been discovered in the above, it can be concluded that Disney/Pixar short films are in fact corporate branding through storytelling and that their purpose is to promote the Disney brand.

9 Conclusion

Today’s globalised world with its abundance of similar goods calls upon the companies to figure out a way to stand out and be unique in the eyes of the consumers. In their struggle to survive the companies can make use of branding to promote their products and hopefully obtain the valuable position as a brand.

The Walt Disney Company is a family entertainment and media enterprise that through decades has managed to stay in front of its field. Today it is one of the leading brands in the world. What has made Disney capable of such great success is its ability of renewing itself. A proof of that was the purchase of Pixar in 2006, which added the 3D dimension to Disney’s CV.

Besides remaining innovative, a contributing factor to Disney’s success is its use of branding. As stated branding is a tool to promote a product, service, company, etc. It is utilised to reach the status of a brand, which by definition is a consumer experience that either consist of a symbol, a name, a service, etc. To have a brand in the product line or indeed as a front figure for the whole company is to possess value. Moreover, a value that makes the difference in the consumers’ decision making process.

Storytelling can be an effective extension to branding, as it may be used to convey company values and messages by the means of a simple story. The companies may show who they are through storytelling in such a way that consumers can easily perceive them. Storytelling consists of four elements, i.e. a plot, a conflict, a message and characters. To determine the characters the fairy-tale model may be applied.
Returning to Disney in terms of branding, it could be claimed that Disney/Pixar short films are branding through storytelling. To prove this claim “Boundin’”, which was launched together with “The Incredibles” in 2004 and “Partly Cloudy”, which was shown in connection with “UP” in 2009, will be used as examples.

Knowing that these films do not always relate directly to the animated feature film they follow, it is hard to determine what purpose they actually serve. As they are not directly linked to the features they cannot serve as a preview. Nor can they be said to be regular products as they are not marketed equally to all other Disney products.

If these two short films are put into the fairy-tale model and analysed in relation to the four elements of storytelling, it is possible to see that they both bear in them Disney’s core story of wholesomeness and happiness. At the same time it could be argued that they reflect positively upon the Disney brand, which makes them ideal for branding. Furthermore, as the Disney brand covers the whole enterprise and this brand is what is reflected in the short films, they may be called corporate branding.

On the basis on what is written above, it may very well be plausible to categorise Disney/Pixar short films as branding through storytelling serving the purpose of promoting the Disney brand.

Characters without blanks: 51.475
10 Summary

In today’s globalised world all companies have to pass the test of uniqueness, so that they may be able to survive in the savage competition of gaining consumers’ favour. In their struggle to be unique, the companies can make use of branding, however, what is branding? To be able to establish what branding actually is, one has to take a look at what a brand is, as the purpose of a branding process is to promote a product, service, company, etc. in such a way that it may obtain the status of a brand.

According to the American Marketing Association a brand is a symbol, a name or a whole set of attributes, which makes it possible for consumers to separate one company’s product from another’s i.e. an asset that conveys meaning, value and values. Hatch and Schultz agree on this and so do Neal and Strauss. There exist several types of brands; however, the two most prominent is corporate brands and product brands. In short corporate brands are the whole business and involve the whole company, whereas product brands only concern one single brand, which is subordinated the corporate brand.

Branding is as stated by Philip Kotler, a much acknowledged marketing theorist, a tool used to obtain this valuable position as a brand, thereby creating customer loyalty. Since there exist a various number of brand types, there exist the same number of branding to promote them.

In addition, storytelling can be incorporated into the branding process. As Fog, Budtz and Yakaboylu suggest, storytelling is the telling of stories and can be very effective in relation to branding as the fact is that the audience finds it easier to perceive messages and company values through a simple story. In other words companies are able to define who they are through storytelling. Furthermore, storytelling contains four elements, which are a plot, a conflict, a message and characters. The characters may be determined by the use of the fairy-tale model, which involves a hero as well as the hero’s goal, a support to the hero, an adversary, a benefactor and a beneficiary.

On basis of what is written about branding and storytelling above, it could be interesting to see an example that proves how it is used in practice and therefore the Walt Disney Company is employed into this thesis.

The Disney Company is a global family entertainment and media enterprise, which was founded in 1923 by Walter E. Disney and his brother Roy Disney and today covers theme parks, networks, film studios, etc. Through the company history it is possible to conclude that the company has managed to stay innovative and on the top in contrast to some of its competitors.
One of the latest additions to the company is Pixar animation studios, which is a smaller animation studio that specialises in 3D animation. This company that in spite of its size has brought significant contributions to the renewal of technology went from being a business partner to a part of the company. At the same time it became part of Disney’s core values, which deals with combining imagination and wholesomeness in order to make people happy.

Now that Disney’s core values are known, it is possible to put the Disney brand into relation with branding as well as storytelling. This can be illustrated by the means of Disney/Pixar short films as these films may be said to be branding through storytelling.

This is because these animated short films do not always connect directly to the animated feature films they have been launched together with and thereby not serving the purpose of an introduction to them. Moreover, nor are they marketed equal to every other product from Disney i.e. sold individually, etc. This means that they cannot be called regular products; however, maybe branding products. The two animated short films used to prove that these film may be called branding through storytelling of the Disney brand, is “Boundin’” from 2006, which follows the animated feature film, “The Incredibles”; and “Partly Cloudy” from 2009, which follows “UP”.

When put into the fairy-tale model and analysed with the help of the four elements in storytelling, a relationship between Disney and these films does appear. It is seen that Disney’s core story could be incorporated into both stories, as they contain the same values and send a message that is coherent with the one of Disney. Furthermore, the Disney brand is reflected positively through the short films, which means that they fulfil the purpose of branding i.e. promoting the brand by conveying company values. In terms of a branding type, it has to be considered that since Disney’s core story is used the short films must be branding for the whole business and thus corporate branding.

On basis of what is written above, the conclusion to whether or not Disney/Pixar short films can be called branding through storytelling to the Disney brand must be a “yes”. With this kind of branding the Disney brand has managed to reach a position as one of the world’s greatest as it has made it unique to customers all over.

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