

If You Want Emotions, Ask For Them

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An interview with Kevin Roberts - by Angiola Codacci-Pisanelli

YOU DON'T BUY A PRODUCT FOR QUALITY TODAY, BUT INSTEAD FOR WHAT IT'S ABLE TO INSPIRE.

Emotions rather than reason, lovers rather than consumers. And above all a discussion on the importance of our immediate sensations that go beyond the confines of marketing (you can't impose a product that the public doesn't perceive as its own) to renew his latest philosophical theories on sentiment in general and love in particular. We've asked Kevin Roberts to talk to us about certain aspects of his book "Lovemarks" and the products that inspire a loyalty that goes beyond reason.

Why is this the moment for Lovemarks, the signs of love?

"Because power has finally shifted from the producer and the salesman to the consumer. Internet's arrived, increasing the possibilities of choice, so the buyer has the right to decide. Consumers' decisions aren't only based on the rational qualities of products, but on the emotions they inspire, and love is the greatest emotion of all."

You speak of women consumers...

"It's true; it's something natural for me because women are the ones who have the buying power. Not only do they buy 80% of the food today, but most of the cars as well."

From your book it seems that industries can't do much to "construct" a Lovemark.

"First of all they can create products that inspire respect not merely because they function, but also because they don't have sweatshops behind them in Asia, or factories that pollute. Industries must also be ecological, alert to the social. More, they have to realize products that inspire mystery, sensuality and intimacy."

Does the "Lovemark" theory also apply to politics?

"Of course. We made a survey, and we discovered that only one person is a global political Lovemark: Nelson Mandela. And only one president of the United States made the grade: John F. Kennedy. The Lovemark is a concept that everyone understands at once, not a gelid theory of marketing. At our website, Lovemarks.com, stories come in one after another; it's an unstoppable flow."

On your site, the first "Lovemark" is Jesus, but in the final analysis, saying that Christ is a person who inspires 'loyalty beyond reason' is an excellent definition, and it isn't even irreverent.

"Yes, that was my impression, too. At first I felt uncomfortable, but then I said to myself that basically this is just what Christianity wants: reason doesn't count, it's only faith. I'm loyal beyond reason to the ideas of heaven and life after death; it's useless to discuss them, you'll never be able to convince me otherwise with reasoning or demonstrations. Think of the Pope; he's a Lovemark if there ever was one: you love him beyond reason, whether or not you accept everything he says, because he represents something beautiful."

You write that advertising is part of pop culture. Don't you think it's becoming "culture" as such?

"It's all of the pop culture that's become mainstream. I think this is because the baby boomers generation is in power. I grew up in the '60s, and I still have the values of those years with me today."

And can countries be Lovemarks? Isn't there a risk of nationalism?

"It's inevitable that countries tend toward nationalism. This is why it's the task of business to go beyond the frontiers and make the world a better place: governments can't do it because their power is nationalistic."

But Lovemarks aren't global, generally.

"That's true; they're more intimate concepts; you have to feel they're close to you. Coca-Cola can succeed in being a global Lovemark only if it acts locally in different places, in Italy as in the United States. Benetton is a global Lovemark because it doesn't seem Italian, but local everywhere. I fell in love with Benetton for a campaign by Toscani. Genial. It didn't say a word about the products, but as soon as I saw one of his posters I went into a store to buy shirts for my wife and children."