

Sascha Demarmels/Ursula Stalder/
Sonja Kolberg

Visual Literacy. How to Understand Texts Without Reading Them

Abstract

Storytelling as a means to raise the motivation of recipients to process information and to support the comprehension of marketing texts written for products that are in need of an explanation. Recent studies on marketing for sustainable energy products have shown that comprehensibility for complex goods often fails because of the low motivation of the recipients to read and process information. We therefore ask how texts have to be shaped in order to reach consumers. Today ›texts‹ are no longer considered to consist only of verbal material but of different codes—they are multimodal. The question is, then, how to increase motivation by enacting the content, by ›staging it‹. Dual processing theories and the strategy of storytelling may prove to be helpful, as some outstanding examples in current marketing practice for sustainable energy have shown.

1. Introduction

For some years now we have been working on applied comprehensibility in several branches, predominantly in the energy sector. We started from the observation that although consumers can choose between many different alternative sources (like solar, water, wind energy), they can never be sure if they actually receive what they have chosen. There is no way for them to actually ›see‹ what kind of energy they use: the computer will not work faster

and the coffee out of the machine will not taste better if more expensive, sustainable energy is used. The question was, then, how to sell green energy to consumers who do not understand the whole energy system: how can these consumers be persuaded to pay more for something they do not see?

While working on this subject we discovered that most people are willing to pay more in order to do something good to the environment. Also, that they are generally interested in behaving in an environmentally friendly way and in learning about possibilities to do so. However, despite the fact that environmental friendliness generates high-involvement, energy is a very low-involvement area. People in general know very little about the topic and they are not interested in getting new information. Even though they are interested in ›having‹ such information, their willingness to read about those complex correlations approximates zero. Results from qualitative interviews suggest that people wish to have marketing brochures that they do not have to read but can simply scan through in order to understand the complex information that is involved. These interviews took us to the question how people read texts, particularly if they have no motivation to process the information, and also to the question of how to design such texts.

To work out the problem of applied comprehensibility, we generated an interdisciplinary model (see fig. 1).

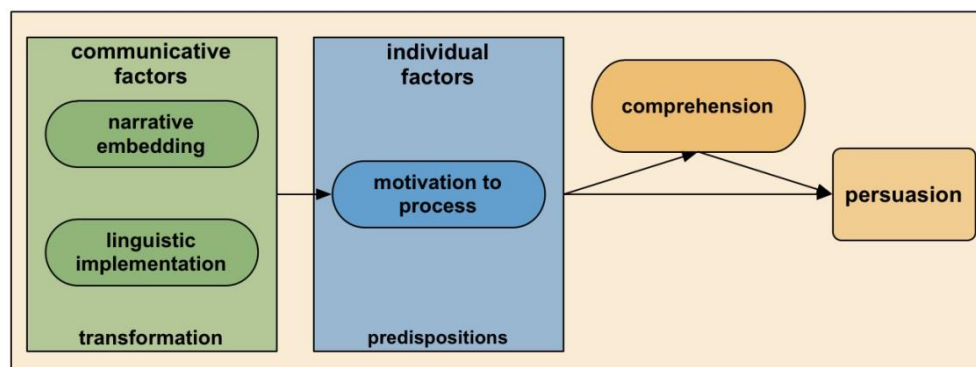


Abb. 1:

Interdisciplinary model of applied comprehensibility for marketing communication (cf. also DEMARMELS/JANOSCHKA 2012; DEMARMELS/SCHAFFNER 2013; JANOSCHKA/DEMARMELS 2013)

The interdisciplinary model of applied comprehensibility for marketing communication is based on communicative and individual factors. Communicative factors can be managed in text production: texts can be well legible and readable (see chapter 2) and the message can be embedded in a comprehensible way (see chapter 4). Individual factors are given from the predispositions of the target groups and can vary from individual to individual: a substantial argument is the motivation of a recipient to understand a text (see chapter 3). Whether a person is persuaded by a text message can depend on whether the person does comprehend this message or not. However, persuasion does not have to be rationally processed but can also be emotionally achieved. Someone can be convinced of a product without knowing the rea-

sons, that is, without understanding the benefits of a certain product (see chapter 3).

2. Communicative Factors

2.1. Linguistic Implementation

If information is processed rationally, comprehension is a key factor. Comprehension is based on three principles which refer to three different phases in which textual information is processed and decoded (cf. VAN VAERENBERGH 2007: 178; cf. also GÖPFERICH 2008; 2009; DEMARMELS 2010: 101):

- Legibility: Can the text be perceived through the sensory organs (see/hear etc., depending on the medium of the text)?
- Readability: Can the words and sentences in the text be understood?
- Comprehensibility: Can the message behind the words be conceived, i.e., can the recipient put together the new information of the text with his or her previous knowledge?

To make a printed text legible seems to be quite trivial. Nevertheless, we found several examples of illegible texts (cf. DEMARMELS/JANOSCHKA 2012). They were written in very small letters or with a very small contrast between the colors of the lettering and of the background (e.g., white lettering on light yellow background). Naturally, persons who are visually impaired might have more problems with a badly legible text, but also persons with good eyesight might prefer a well legible text because it demands less concentration¹ and seems to be more respectful towards its recipients.

However, readability is also a question of style: a scientific paper requires a different choice of words and phrases than an article for a boulevard magazine. Readability is something that can be objectively measured—not in terms of ›good‹ and ›bad‹, but rather in terms of ›suitable for the audience‹. As mentioned earlier, our studies focus on marketing texts for products in need of an explanation. We can assume that the target group here is very heterogeneous and that in order to reach as many of them as possible it is necessary to communicate in a rather simple way. However, if sentences are formed too simply, texts get monotonous and boring, which is bound to put off more sophisticated readers. There is no easy way out of this dilemma. Typical barriers in the researched marketing texts were too many nominalizations and sentences that were too complicated (DEMARMELS/SCHAFFNER 2013; JANOSCHKA/DEMARMELS 2013).²

¹ Some studies have shown though that lack of legibility in texts can result in a higher dedication of the recipients and, therefore, improves motivation (cf. KAHNEMAN 2011: 65; HOFFMANN 2006: 106).

² It has to be stated here, though, that we were only looking at German texts. The criteria of readability can vary from language to language.

Reaching the phase of comprehensibility, it becomes even more difficult to meet the demands of the reader. Whether someone can link new information in a text to suitable connecting factors depends on his or her previous individual knowledge. The activity of linking demands a high amount of cognitive energy from the recipient—people with low motivation to process such information probably will break off reading (cf. DEMARMELS 2010: 110; cf. also AARNOUTSE/VAN LEEUWE 1998; CALCOTT/PHILLIPS 1996; CHAIKEN 1980; PETTY/CACIOPPO 1983). In our study of marketing texts we found a high amount of complex knowledge and references to knowledge, for example in form of technical terms (DEMARMELS 2015; JANOSCHKA/DEMARMELS 2013). Technical terms are useful to describe facts in a very differentiated way, but they also operate on a very high level. Most people in the target group will therefore not understand the technical terms. This bias led to major discussions between marketing experts and product managers (JANOSCHKA/DEMARMELS 2013: 86): whereas marketing experts want to have comprehensible texts to persuade consumers, the aim of product managers is to give an exact description of the product—a description that is neither comprehensible for most people that are working in another field nor is it really necessary for them in order to decide whether to buy a product or not (cf. also DEMARMELS 2015).

2.2 Multimodal Texts

In the present world texts hardly ever consist only of verbal material but of written language mixed with visual components (cf. BUCHER 2010; cf. also DEMARMELS 2011). These mixed text forms are called multimodal texts (cf. for example JEWITT 2009; KRESS/VAN LEEUWEN 2001; STÖCKL 2004; VAN LEEUWEN 2005). A multimodal text assembles different codes depending on the medium it is produced for. For example, a text for audiovisual media can consist of moving pictures, stills, music, spoken and written verbal texts. A printed text can be composed of pictures like photos, painted or drawn images, graphics and so on plus written verbal texts. Typography and layout also contribute to the visual impression of a printed text.

In our research of applied comprehensibility we found some criteria influencing not only legibility, readability and comprehensibility but also the motivation of the recipient to process a text. Janich (2006: 205) confirms that general willingness and motivation to process a text are influenced not only by the recipient being interested in the content but also by the design of a text. Especially if the design offers an efficient orientation through the text, e.g., by multimodal modules or meaningful captions, this has a positive effect on the attractiveness of a text (LÜGER 2002: 370f.). Janich (2006: 205) further mentions text structure, typography, font size, and highlighting.

A quantitative study on comprehensibility has shown the vital role of structuring elements in the text. They may give the recipients a feeling of comprehensibility or help from the text (cf. DEMARMELS 2010: 110) even if the text as such is not very comprehensible. One of the tested texts was rather

complex but well structured. Also, it had a textbox with further information. Test persons interpreted this textbox not as further information but as an explanatory summary. This interpretation was not due to the content of the textbox but due to the fact that the textbox seemed to function as a text signal. Test persons believed that textboxes summarize the important part of the text and they explain difficult passages. We could not reconstruct why people would think that, but other studies proofed that the assumption ›textboxes help to understand‹ is generally held—although they practically never do (cf. DEMARMELS et al. 2013: 32–33). With the text itself seeming to support their effort to understand the content, many test persons gained new motivation and tried harder to understand the text and even estimated its comprehensibility higher than it actually was (DEMARMELS 2010: 110).

If layout elements may have a crucial impact on motivation to process information, in order to produce an optimally comprehensible text, questions of layout and design must also be considered. Also, in order to create a perfect text one must know how readers read a text and what motivates them to process complex information (about a low-involvement product). In our most recent research we have gathered such information.

2.3 Looking for the Perfect Text

Our research consisted primarily of qualitative interviews based on (fictional) marketing brochures for alternative energy (cf. DEMARMELS et al. 2013). We found that the following criteria raise the motivation to process information about energy products:

- pictures with positive associations
- small volume of text(s)
- titles and captions that are summarizing and triggering
- colors structuring the text
- textboxes

Pictures were mostly rated as positive and motivating especially if they were found aesthetically attractive. If the subject of the text was very complex, people wished for graphical explanation, for example for an informational graphic. Also, if the text was about something in the real world not known to them, interviewees wished for correspondent photos. In another context—a project about sustainable campaigning to influence behavior (cf. SCHAFFNER et al. 2015)—pictures were negatively rated if the test persons felt manipulated, for example when pictures showed ›sad‹ things like birds covered in oil. Pictures often are decisive whether a text is read. We also discovered that this could lead to the effect that if a picture speaks for itself the surrounding text is not read—recipients consider the text to be redundant.

Secondly, the volume of a text as a whole and also the volume of the components of the text often are crucial for the decision to (not) read a text. Of course, someone may start to read a text and then abandon this activity,

but if a text seems too voluminous, many people do not even start to read it nor do they read single parts of it. The volume of a text is not only constructed by the number of words or signs (we discovered that the number of 1000 signs seems to be an acceptable amount of volume for this sort of text—that is a very small article in a newspaper), but the impression of the volume is also influenced by typography and font size. Small fonts gave interviewees the impression of a very long text. They believed that authors chose a smaller font size because otherwise, they wouldn't have been able to fit in the text. Also, if a text block was not well structured, for example by captions or blank spots in the layout, the volume seemed to be more extensive and the motivation to process the content sank.

Many people tend to orient their reading along titles and captions. Often, captions are decisive whether a text (or a part of a text) is read. Captions can be motivating because they can make readers curious. Most of the time, interviewees preferred titles summarizing the text that followed. In addition, if they got the impression that a title summarized the text, they did not read on, believing that this would be redundant, too (as they guessed with the equivalent pictures). If there were misleading titles people got upset and their motivation to read decreased even further. Keeping in mind that there are readers who read only titles, it seems to be crucial to have titles that are summarizing and precise.

Also, test persons appreciated it if a text was structured by colors. For example, they thought it was helpful if the same products were marked by the same colors. But then, the colors were not to be changed—one color should be used for one product throughout the brochure. And the number of colors in a brochure is limited, since one cannot process too many (color) codes at once. Some people felt manipulated, if they guessed a symbolic meaning or association of a certain color—intended or not. For example, when energy of atomic sources was displayed in red, they associated a bad rating with this kind of energy. They suspected that the energy vendor intended to make them feel bad if they opted for this energy. The same impression occurred also when a certain product was placed differently in the layout (for example if the atomic energy was placed at the back side whereas the other products were on the front) and when small font sizes were used (test persons believed that texts in small font sizes were not really meant to be read—in German you would call that ›das Kleingedruckte‹, often associated with terms not so much in favor of the consumer).

Textboxes (as already mentioned above, see chapter 2.2) also help to structure a text. Often they are perceived as summaries, or as texts offering an explanation. However, if there are too many textboxes this tends to make the text structure confusing and the helping function gets lost. Some people were not sure what the function of the text boxes were, therefore they did not appreciate them but probably would have if their purpose was clear.

The purpose or function of a text (in a linguistic/pragmatic sense) is important because it has a great impact on the motivation to process a text:

many people are not willing to read a text if they do not know what for. For example, they want to know before reading whether a text informs them about something or whether they should do something (e.g., using less energy, buying another energy product like sun power etc.). Since the energy system in Switzerland has not been liberated yet in terms of private use of energy, many energy companies are not used to actively sell their products to private consumers. What is common sense in other branches of marketing is a novelty to the energy vendors here. They first have to acquaint themselves with accepted marketing routines such as telling people that a certain product is the best and that they should buy it.

3. Individual Factors

Before changing perspective and looking at the production point of view (see chapter 4), the motivation to process information shall be examined. We already saw some criteria of comprehensibility and how they effect the motivation to read a text. Still, there are some more criteria influencing the motivation and the comprehension of communication stimuli. They are related to the shifting conditions under which communication takes place. One of these contextual conditions that are detrimental for how communication messages are perceived is information overload as it occurs in the present time (KROEBER-RIEL/ESCH 2011).

The hypothesis of information overload creates a close connection between the amount of information offered and the amount of information processed. It starts from the assumption that the human brain is limited regarding the acquisition, processing and storage of information. Since individuals have a limited amount of cognitive capacity to allocate among different tasks (LANG 2000), consumers are less attentive and more selective. Media contents compete for cognitive resources, and attention has to be divided (JEONG/FISHBEIN 2007).

Driven by the informational ›explosion‹ of our media environment and reinforced by the rapid diffusion of internet communication, information overload is caused as well by shifting media usage patterns such as permanent standby, media multitasking, mobile devices and digital conversations as well as by overstimulation of marketing messages and POS (point-of-sale) stimuli. Due to the increasing amount of information the receptiveness of the consumers decreases. Research into communication and persuasion effectiveness shows that in Central Europe today there is an overload of approximately 98 percent. This means that the consumer is ready and able to process and save only two percent of all the information acting on him (KROEBER-RIEL/ESCH 2011). This condition affects not only the decision-making behavior, but also the perception and processing of advertising messages.

3.1 Dual-Processing Theories

Dual-processing theories, such as the Heuristic-Systematic Model (CHEN/CHAIKEN 1999) and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (PETTY/CACIOPPO 1986) give insight into how persuasive messages are processed. These theories generally distinguish between two types of processing: systematic or central processing and heuristic or peripheral processing. Systematic processing requires an effort, with extensive elaboration, involving active learning and evaluation of the arguments in the message. Heuristic processing is more superficial and relies on simple heuristic cues or shortcuts, such as the number of arguments, the attractiveness of the source, and emotional appeals (CHEN/CHAIKEN 1999; PETTY/CACIOPPO 1986). Since the actual information burden and media multitasking leads to divided attention, this may result in a reduced ability (or: willingness) to process information thoroughly, possibly resulting in persuasion based on superficial cues instead of arguments.

Further research into communication effectiveness allows the conclusion that the way in which a persuasive message is processed primarily depends on the involvement consumers have with a product or a service. Within the marketing context, the term involvement is defined as the degree to which consumers feel that the product has something to do with them and their personality (›Ich-Bezug‹). In other words: involvement marks the psychological feeling of relevance that is attributed to a product or a service. This corresponds to the engagement with which consumers turn their attention towards the message (cf. KROEBER-RIEL/ESCH 2011).

Highly involved consumers focus on the characteristics of the product that are relevant to them. They absorb new information and form an opinion about the product or service based on this information. This is what is called systematic or central processing. With the term *central* Petty and Cacioppo (1983; 1996) highlight the fact that highly involved consumers do not root their judgement in an extraneous impressions but in information relating to essential (therefore: *central*) characteristics of the offer. Persuasive communication that wants to influence consumers under these conditions must select the systematic or central route of influence, e.g., by relying on facts, testimonials, as well as on content-rich media to approach consumers and attract them (KROEBER-RIEL/ESCH 2011).

Low involvement on the other hand leads to conditions under which the consumer is ›mentally‹ not activated sufficiently in order to think accurately about the product or service. Since information perception and processing is limited and ephemeral, clues for a rational assessment of the product are scarce. Thus, the attitude of the consumer depends largely on peripheral and more affective impressions. Persuasive communication that wants to influence consumers under these conditions should rely on stressing visual formats, highlighting gratifications that result from the use of the product or service, keeping copy texts as short as possible as well as offering concrete ›call to actions‹.

Although the distinction between these two processing pathways is a somewhat simplified model, a multiplicity of empirical studies has confirmed the model (cf. RUCKER/CACIOPPO 2006). All studies prove that emotions play a role in both routes, even in the central one, although not as dominant as in the peripheral one (GIERL/REICH 2005). From the point of view of neuroscientific research this can be explained by the fact that emotions precede the cognitions, or, emotions are always involved (cf. DAMASIO 2000).

More recent theories such as the ›Affective-Cognitive-Framework« (SHIV/FEDORIKHIN/NOWLIS 2005) conceptualize the interplay between affect and cognition. These theories are based on the distinction between lower-order affective reactions (arising from relatively automatic processes) and higher-order affective reactions (arising from relatively more controlled higher-order processes) involved in thinking, reasoning, and consciousness as well as in lower- and higher-order cognitive reactions (SHIV/FEDORIKHIN 1999). Emotions and cognitions of higher order are associated with more processing resources than lower-order emotions and cognitions. Shiv et al. note that the effect of emotional and vivid stimuli becomes stronger the more mentally active a person is, or, on the other hand, the more thoughtlessly someone behaves in the marketing environment (SHIV/FEDORIKHIN/NOWLIS 2005).

3.2 Energy Products as Low-Involvement Products

This corresponds well to the discovered discrepancy of high- and low-involvement in the energy-product-selling: whereas ›environmental friendly behavior« seems to be a high-involvement area, energy products are very low-involvement. People do not know about the energy system and they are not willing to engage in information offers in order to learn more about available energy products. We therefore see energy products as low-involvement products.

As stated above, research in the area of sustainable energy products has shown that layout elements like textboxes and colors also affect motivation to read a text. Also, heuristic appeals can be taken into account, for example labels for sustainability. But labels often seem to be unknown in this area and therefore probably do not work in that heuristic way. People are even suspicious about labels (DEMARMELS et al. 2013: 32). Then, interactive forms of communication should be considered to involve the recipients actively in the communication and with storytelling they can be engaged emotionally (cf. DEMARMELS et al. 2013).

4. Storytelling as Solution

4.1 Storytelling

The rise of storytelling in marketing is closely linked to the current conditions of information overload and the decline of involvement—both fostering heuristic information processing (see chapter 3). Unlike advertising techniques like posters, TV spots or web banners, storytelling as a presentation mode does not emphasize the positive representation of one's product or company, but enacts the benefit of its use. By presenting the message embedded in situations and symbols well-known to consumers, storytelling seeks to stimulate emotional involvement as an antecedent of rational involvement. Therefore, within the framework of Integrated Marketing Communication, storytelling can be understood as a specific strategy of tying together clues for lower-order as well as higher-order processing.

Storytelling shouldn't be understood as a mere pastime, but as a specific form to impart and arrange knowledge. According to Holzinger and Sturmer (2010), stories have always been a form of discourse through which actions, incidents and meanings were organized. Mangold emphasizes that the transferring of a theme by means of a story represents a prime example of informal learning where the majority of knowledge is conveyed at different levels and mostly implicitly (MANGOLD 2007).

The tapping of marketing into storytelling theories picks up this thread. Although there are several differences between mere fictional stories and marketing stories that are highly relevant when it comes to strategic planning, all stories display the same core: They are organized in a way that the narrative structure they follow includes a story arc. This dramaturgy is crucial as its climax is the ideal moment to create an emotional impact and thus become the instrument to reach the audience within its own reality.

Emotionality as a criterion for quality shouldn't be equated with entertainment in the sense of diversion. On the contrary: diversion distracts attention from the real issue (PÖTTKER 2000). However, emotionality in the sense of excitement, sensuality and clarity keeps the willingness of the recipient to receive information alive and also supports his or her ability to remember the information received. Especially for complex, allegedly abstract or irrelevant topics, good storytelling can be a key to create emotion. According to Holzinger and Sturmer (2010) the core of any well-told story is:

- A clear message: What should be achieved with the story (the moral).
- Strong characters and powerful incidents: The more intense the incidents, experiences and feelings the characters acting encounter, the better for the story.
- An exciting dramaturgy: What is the storyline that runs recipients through the entire plot? Are there any turning points, biographic breaks or even conflicts? The true nature of a character is particularly evident in a conflict situation.

- The place: Good descriptions of the stories' environment allow recipients to get an idea of the milieu of the story and to understand the context of what's happening.
- An appropriate style of language: Language creates atmosphere and every story should have its own vocabulary that allows that.

A story should be entertaining and instructive at the same time. According to Mangold, stories are not per se instructive:

To fulfill their potential for informal learning processes, stories need to be aligned with the interests and information needs of visitors, have a tension and ideally convey various information units of different levels of detail, without losing its narrative coherence or their ›learning objectives‹. (MANGOLD 2007: 2)

An excellent example of storytelling as a mode of presenting a marketing message is the Siemens »Answers«-campaign (running from 2009–2011). Although a typical ›reference story‹, the approach is non-classical. Very often, typical reference stories are ›told too straight‹: they are nothing but a reproduction of the corporate message from a different perspective, the conclusions are not up to the viewer and the people in the audience are perceived far too little ›as intelligent beings‹.

Siemens produced more than 50 short films that take a personal look at the lives of people benefitting from pioneering technology. They tell stories in which Siemens actually plays the leading role, but can be experienced only in a supporting role: with a simple reference to the Siemens services uncredited. The sender of the films is clear, but the stories are not Siemens-centered—the stories are told consistently from the perspective of the people who benefit from Siemens technology, and they have the individual ›look and feel‹ of the filmmaker. Storytelling in the »Answers«-campaign is more than putting a few pretty pictures into sequence and complementing them with nice music. It aims at building up a tension, creating an expectation in the

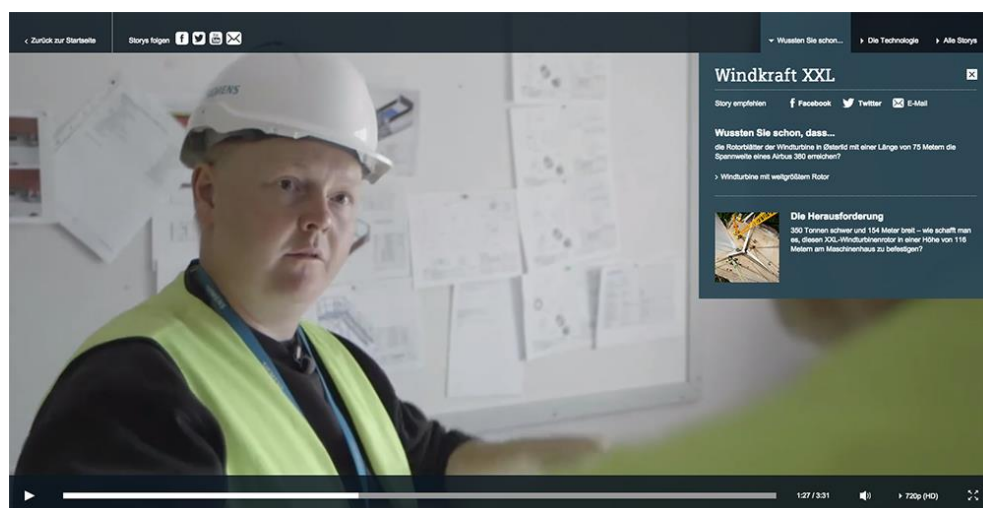


Abb. 2:
Screenshot taken from the video clip »Wind power XXL«, Siemens »Answers«-campaign (B-to-C)

viewer to be told a story in the traditional sense, that is, a story that people love to hear.

4.2 Storytelling as a Marketing Practice

Unlike cultural or art formats such as fairy tales, novels, literary texts or even paintings, marketing stories need to reach an audience that is initially not interested in the message. Unlike a reader beginning to read a new book or a cinema-goer awaiting the start of a movie, the targeted individual of a marketing stimulus has chosen neither the moment of being confronted with the story nor the story itself. He/she is therefore not ›framed‹ for what he/she is confronted with. Therefore, it is crucial for storytelling practices within marketing to react to the initial situation of unplanned interruption and the unwillingness of the recipient to switch the attention.

It follows from this that within the marketing framework, storytelling is conceptualized on two different levels: it is not only about the ›presentation level‹ through which the audience should get emotionally engaged (see chapter 4.1). It is concerned first of all with how to activate consumers in order to stimulate their attention and readiness to process information. Therefore, the second level of storytelling concerns the techniques used to convey lower-level emotional clues in order to activate lower-order affective and cognitive reactions. An emotional experience is built up by the story, using a skillful mixture of different media and experience-orientated design that stimulate the different senses of the recipient and raise the emotional value of the subject. The second level is about interweaving strong visuals and cultural symbols as well as ascribing additional news factors to the story.

All of these storytelling practices are based in fundamental communication techniques. These are (cf. KROEBER-RIEL/ESCH 2011):

- techniques to raise activation by providing physically intense, emotionally touching or cognitively surprising clues;
- techniques to convey emotions such as the creation of a perception atmosphere around the stimulus, imparting experience through images, direct interactions with the media stimulus or even live experiences;
- techniques to reduce perception barriers such as respecting fixation sequences, building information hierarchies within and across media as well as providing recurrent elements to support recognition and memorizing.

The current shift to visual communication modes that can be observed in marketing messages can be understood as techniques to stimulate this lower-order emotional reactions: easily decodable visual elements, highly aestheticized multimodal infographics, explanatory movies as well as massively reduced texts volumes, clearly structured text elements and layouts that build up visual hierarchies all have one thing in common: they aim at involving recipients emotionally as well as rationally.



Abb. 3:
Energie360' strategy map visualizing its range of sustainable energy solutions (Image: Courtesy of Energie360)

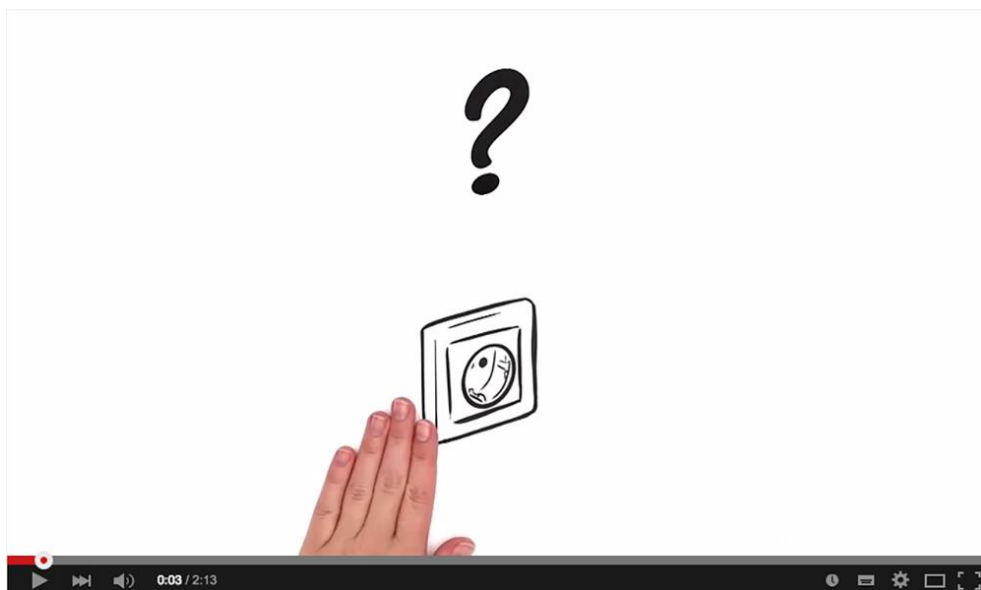


Abb. 4:
Screenshot taken from the explanatory video clip »Der Stromsee—Was sind erneuerbare Energien?«, Elektrizitätswerke Zürich EWZ

Another technique within marketing-related storytelling practices relies on the theory of news factors which traces back the selection of news made by journalists to specific qualities of the event. The theoretical model proceeds from the assumption that several news factors determine the news value of an event. Although the theory of news factors was originally developed to describe the selection process of journalists, it was almost immediately transferred to describe the process of reception by consumers (GALTUNG/RUGE

1965; LIPPMANN 1922; ÖSTGAARD 1965). For all of them, news factors are criteria not only relevant for professional journalists, but rather describing cognitive psychological mechanisms in general. News factors are event features that generally attract people's interest. They help to combine new information with existing knowledge and also to remember new information afterwards. Current models of news value research assume that the same criteria play a role for the reception as well as for the remembering (reconstruction) of the message (cf. MAIER 2010: 25).

In the European research tradition Östgaard (1965) developed a complex theory that condensed different components of news into three factors: simplification, identification and sensationalism. Galtung and Ruge (1965) further developed Östgaards theory and differentiated between twelve news factors and five hypotheses regarding their interdependence. While for these authors news factors were objective qualities of an event, Schulz (1976) proposed a new approach by claiming that news factors are based on subjective definitions made by journalists, thus being merely interpretations of reality. By revising the catalogue of news factors developed by Galtung and Ruge and adding other factors, he came up with nineteen news factors in his second study which he subsumed under six dimensions: status, valence, relevance, identification, consonance and dynamics.

Kepplinger (1989) points out—as Lippmann already did—that the relationship between news factors and media attention is not based on a causal, but rather on a functional connection: journalists and editors can exploit news factors by ascribing news factors to a story. This can be done in two ways. On the one hand, news factors can explicitly be ascribed to an event. On the other hand, news factors can be referred to implicitly. In writing a story the journalist can stress different aspects of an actual event—e.g., cause and effect, similar incidents, comments on an event etc.—and therefore also stress different news factors. As a consequence, he/she can vary the meaning as well as the emphasis given to an event and the corresponding story.

Both practices are often used within marketing storytelling, too, to overcome low emotional involvement, to attract attention, to alleviate the processing and reconstruction of the message. Examples are the integration of celebrities, cultural symbols, pop songs or visual styles that are well-known and valued by the targeted audience.

A good example illustrating this storytelling practice is RWE's integrated campaign »Energy world« with TV commercials, advertisements, promotions and online banners, taking energy hogs a bead.³ The campaign was launched alongside the start of the fourth season of the popular German comedy series *Stromberg*. Christoph Maria Herbst, who embodies the »office meanie« Bernd Stromberg who has attained cult status with his wacky wisdom and rough platitudes, plays the same character as an »anti hero« of energy efficiency. Each video clip shows a different situation in which the curiosity

³ The campaign was implemented by the advertising agencies Jung von Matt and Elbe 2009.

of the sceptical Stromberg is raised by the efficiency measures of his neighbors.



Abb. 5:
Bernd Stromberg, the ›anti-hero‹ of energy efficiency. RWE »Energiewelt«-campaign 2009 (Image: Courtesy of RWE)

The RWE campaign not only uses the cult status of Bernd Stromberg to present its story, but also connects the moment of the presentation launch tightly to the widely discussed season start to further activate attention. The five different campaign videos make it possible to vary the message for different consumer segments according to their individual relevance sets. The availability and easy distribution of the videos ensured by social media channels allow getting in touch with the targeted individuals in different moments and varying contexts.

Two years later, in 2011, adjusted to the launch of the fifth season, RWE reapplies the same practice by launching a new video series: the scenes are again centered around Bernd Stromberg and his awakening curiosity for energy saving opportunities—this time to promote RWE's new ›Smart home‹-products. The campaign website focusing on RWE's services and products around energy-efficient building, renovation and daily life (see www.energiewelt.de) offers a wide range of different forms such as images, pictures, self-checks and service offerings to emotionally engage consumers, allowing them to decide the moment and depth of further confrontation. The narrative coherence and the ›learning objectives‹ are the same throughout all modes and genres: there are many opportunities to save energy and only nerds are ignoring them. The TV character Stromberg is particularly credible because he has changed his ironic attitude, casting off his role of a smart

aleck. The sometimes nasty series hero has become the secret supporter of energiewelt.de.

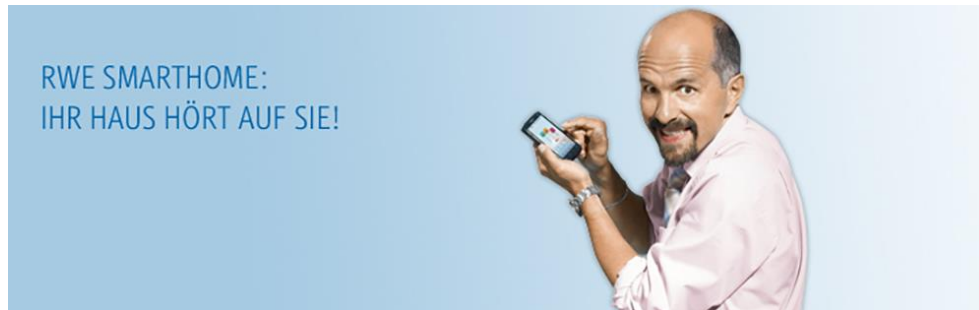


Abb. 6:

Bernd Stromberg, the »anti-hero« of energy efficiency. RWE »Energiewelt«-campaign 2011 (Image: (c) Brainpool/ Willy Weber, courtesy of RWE)

Another interesting example for explicitly and implicitly ascribing news value to a story is the political campaign of Prosolar, an initiative of the association for solar energy Swisssolar.⁴ To raise awareness for its political petition and the beginning collection of signatures, the campaign was launched at the yearly Locarno Film Festival where potential target groups gather in anticipation of new cinematic discoveries. The key visual depicts Switzerland's Energy Minister Doris Leuthard as the female *Star Wars*-hero princess Leila—including laser sword. Entitled »Solar Wars« and produced in the style of a classic movie poster promoting the release of »Episode 5—The Golden Sun«, it attracts attention and awareness by combining fictional news values with the campaign message and adds fictional aspects to both sides: to the event of the Locarno film festival by suggesting that federal chancellor Doris Leuthard is present, and to the mobilization goal of the petition by implicitly stressing the message that it is Leuthard herself, in her function as chancellor responsible for the »Energiestrategie 2050«, who has to fight for solar energy.

⁴ The campaign was implemented by the advertising agency Feinheit 2013.

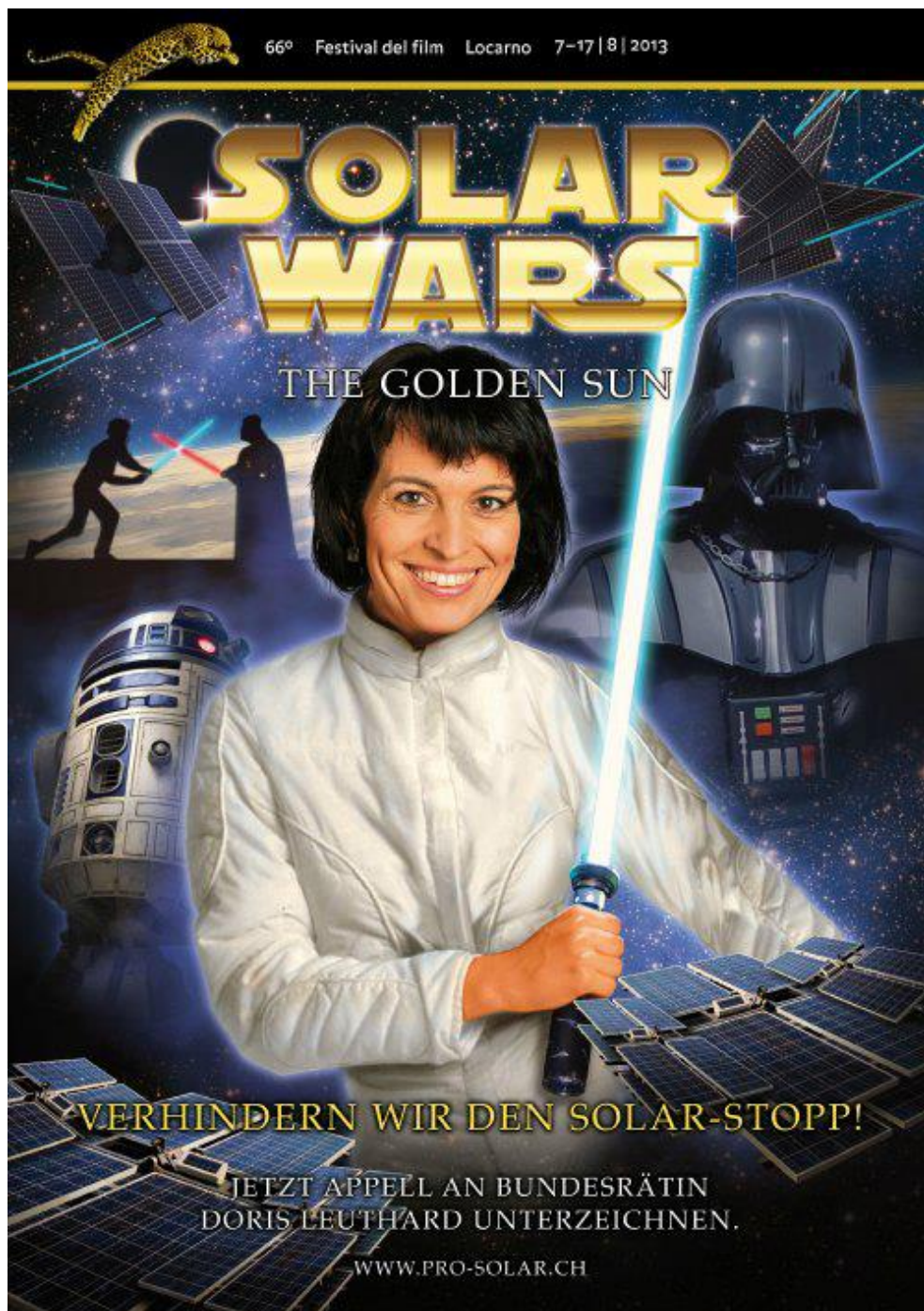


Abb. 7:
Switzerland's Energy Minister Doris Leuthard as Princess Leila. Prosolar »Solarwars«-campaign
2013 (Image: Courtesy of Prosolar, Zürich)

5. Conclusion

Results of an experiment with an online focus group showed that information about energy presented in the mode of storytelling has a better chance to be perceived by potential consumers. But even then, this information has to be well structured, readable, legible and comprehensible as well as nicely presented. Recipients wish to have concrete instructions what to do and they want the maximum of service possible (for example, they do not only want to be told to use a certain device to reduce energy consumption, but also where exactly they can buy this device). Verbal texts should be as short as possible and the message should be as clear as possible. Also, the motivation for the recipients to do certain things or even to read the text must become clear immediately. Last but not least, texts and contents should also entertain.

As a consequence, the question to be asked for future research is not ›How can texts about sustainable energy be more skillfully phrased?‹ but ›How can these messages be enacted or »staged«?‹ The answer to this question must take into account different kinds of media. Layout has to come after content, the subject has to be attached to a story and form(at)s have to be practicable.

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