
Starbucks: A case study examining power and culture via radical sociodrama

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Abstract

This paper employs a new theoretical construct – radical sociodrama – as a lens to analyse how Starbucks exerts power in its interactions with consumers and other stakeholders. Investigating the corporation’s use of language and symbols to create a unique cultural community reveals how Starbucks wields power to achieve its financial aims. Radical sociodrama is formulated from the pioneering work of Mickey (sociodrama) and Athens (radical interactionism). The new theory advances our understanding of power and public relations by demonstrating how organisations use language and symbols to exert domination in the exchange with consumers and stakeholders.

Introduction

The Starbucks corporate mission statement is audacious in its ambition: “To inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup, and one neighborhood at a time” (Starbucks, n.d.). The language regarding the “human spirit” appears odd and out of place as a corporate mantra. It seems an unusual ideology at the heart of a multinational corporation. This lofty aspiration might be more palatable as the mission of a nonprofit, arts institution, or non-governmental organisation (NGO), such as Amnesty International or Doctors Without Borders. Yet, this kind of language – deliberately employed by the corporation to create a common culture for company employees, consumers, and other stakeholders – is central to the Starbucks global brand.

Starbucks’ use of language and symbols is at the centre of its concerted efforts to create a community with and for its customers that promotes its belief system, which it claims is

based on notions of common good, philanthropy, and social consciousness. By engaging with the corporation, the enterprise is assuming that one subscribes to its goals and aspirations. Starbucks chief executive Howard Schultz (1997) discusses the importance of creating culture in a chapter of his memoir titled, ‘The imprinting of the company’s values’. Speaking to Schultz’s grandiosity, the chapter epigraph quotes from Martin Luther King, Jr. on how a man should be measured in challenging times. On inculcating culture, Schultz explains, “Whether you are the CEO or a lower level employee, the single most important thing you do at work each day is communicate your values to others” (p. 81).

As it engaged in creating a unique community around its corporate mantra, Starbucks became a lifestyle brand. There is more going on than simply buying and selling coffee. It is as if there is an unspoken calling to a common set of goals and aspirations between corporation and consumer with each cup sold, or a secret wink and nod that provides some sense of collective good, which not only resonates in the United States, but also globally. For example, in examining the company’s success in China, Schultz (2011) explains, “The Chinese had embraced Starbucks for the same primary reason that customers in the other 52 countries we operate in had. Quite simply, there has always been a universal appeal in our ability to elevate the coffee experience by creating a connection” (p. 305).

The irony in this exchange is that individuals are eagerly granting what is basically a fast food company the right to determine some piece of his or her worldview. One deliberately chooses to buy into the ‘Starbucks Experience’ and what the corporation designs that to mean. Journalist Chris Hedges (2009) points to the challenge in this mind-set, where corporations

control how people characterise themselves, explaining:

The purpose and goals of the corporation are never questioned. To question them, to engage in criticism of the goals of the collective, is to be obstructive and negative. The corporations are the powers that determine identity. The corporations tell us who we are and what we can become. And the corporations offer the only route to personal fulfilment and salvation. If we are not happy there is something wrong with us. Debate and criticism, especially about the goals and structure of the corporation, are condemned as negative and ‘counterproductive.’ (Hedges, 2009, p. 117)

There is tacit and overt power in an environment where goods and services are exchanged in a community created by one side of the relationship that has a vested interest in serving as an arbiter of style and taste.

Certainly, consumers hold free will and may opt out of the power relationship with a megabrand like Starbucks by simply not purchasing its products. However, the corporation’s pervasiveness (based on number of stores it operates in the U.S. and globally and the resulting loss of alternative neighbourhood coffeehouses) and engagement as a community status symbol make it nearly impossible to avoid in many communities.

Although the customer purchases the product from Starbucks, the concurrent development of a Starbucks lifestyle creates significance that undermines the traditional power structure between buyer and seller. Anyone walking into a Starbucks store, moseying up to the counter, and realising that in that contrived setting that a simple ‘large coffee’ does not exist, immediately understands how the ritualised ordering process, product names, and intensity of the sensory environment flips the power relationship. The corporation dominates the

buyer both as an entity with innumerable resources and in determining access to the product and luxury it symbolises. Athens (2010) differentiates between power and domination, clarifying, “Although power can have multiple sources and thereby take on many different guises, domination always displays the same basic form – a certain person or group performing the super-ordinate role in the construction of a social act” (p. 349).

Power and dominance, though roundly rejected as negative consequences of the public’s interaction with institutions and organisations, is at the core of the public relations and communications function of corporations. Americans routinely allow corporations to exert power and dominance over them every day. Heath (2008) portrays the ubiquity of this exchange, explaining, “companies, nonprofits, and government agencies work to gain power, exert power to accomplish their mission, and attempt to use power to control their destiny” (p. 2). The natural question then, is why a democratic society would accept such high levels of control and dominance?

As indicated by Starbucks’ 2011 fiscal year results, including record revenues of \$11.7 billion, the creation of a Starbucks-centric culture is critical to the enterprise’s financial wellbeing. Starbucks realised that corporations that master the art of communication through language and symbols find success. This is not, however, a new concept. More than half a century ago, the self-styled ‘father of public relations,’ Edward Bernays (1947), claimed, “For only by mastering the techniques of communication can leadership be exercised fruitfully in the vast complex that is modern democracy in the United States” (p. 113). Language allows corporations to persuade, explain, motivate and justify the actions they perform (Mickey, 1995, p. 27). Thus, corporations like Starbucks that excel in interacting with consumers often thrive in the marketplace, particularly when the product is a consumer good.

Power and dominance are societal norms and enduring aspects of human existence. However, corporations will meet resistance

from critics if power and dominance are exercised without legitimacy. Heath (2008) argues, “The challenge is for each organisation to be viewed as legitimate in its understanding of the situation in which it operates, the formulation of plans to accomplish its mission, and the crafting and accommodating means to implement plans to achieve that future” (p. 8). Public relations and the other disciplines lumped together under the broad corporate label of ‘marketing’, all provide tools for organisations to create its case for legitimacy with its stakeholders.

Using Starbucks as a case study in exploring a corporation’s power relationship with its various audiences demonstrates why publics are willing to hand over power to entities by engaging with a new theoretical construct – radical sociodrama. Investigating the corporation’s use of language and symbols to create a unique cultural community reveals how Starbucks wields power to achieve its financial aims. Radical sociodrama is formulated from the pioneering work of Mickey (sociodrama)(1995, 2008) and Athens (radical interactionism) (2002, 2007, 2009, 2010).

Combining the work of Mickey and Athens, derived from public relations and sociology, enables the articulation of a new theory that advances our understanding of power and public relations by demonstrating how organisations use language and symbols to exert domination in the exchange with consumers and stakeholders. This research provides an exploratory examination regarding how scholars might employ radical sociodrama to organisational communications to determine how corporations and other institutions employ power and dominance in interactions with stakeholders.

Theoretical rationale

Using sociology and symbolic interactionism to study public relations

Much of the sociologist’s goal – studying organised life and society – intersects with the public relations practitioner’s task in creating organisational stories and narratives (Bentele

& Wehmeier, 2007; Ihlen, van Ruler & Fredriksson, 2009). In the case of consumer goods companies, like Starbucks, communicators actively invent pseudo-worlds for consumers. Many of the creative worlds that communicators craft are based on fact (such as quarterly earnings, speeches, fact sheets), while other aspects contain potentially fictive elements (advertisements, websites, point-of-sale material, packaging copy). In essence, sociologists study life as it is organised, while public relations practitioners play a role in organising life for stakeholders.

The underlying framework for this study is symbolic interactionism, a theory that grew out of late nineteenth and early twentieth century work by philosophers and sociologists such as William James, John Dewey, and George H. Mead. Mead (1863-1931) is considered the father of symbolic interactionism (Athens, 2007, p. 137) and a towering figure in the Chicago School that grew out of the work of theorists based at the University of Chicago.

Denzin (1992) explains that interactionist thinkers “believe in the contingency of self and society and conceive of social reality from the vantage point of change and transformations” (p. 2). Growing out of pragmatism, symbolic interactionism explores how people create meaning for themselves and the broader society through a system of constant negotiation, modification, and re-assemblage as they interact with others. In other words, people actively create meanings for themselves and society through dealings with others.

‘Reality’ in symbolic interactionism terms is an ever-changing terrain based on new criteria and experiences bombarding the individual through additional interaction. According to Mills (1963):

The first rule for understanding the human condition is that men live in a second-hand world. The consciousness of men does not determine their existence; nor does their existence determine their consciousness. Between the human consciousness and material existence stand communications and designs, patterns and values which

influence decisively such consciousness as they have. (p. 375)

For scholar Charon (2004), interactionism provides a worldview of a human being as an active individual, thinking, creating, self-directing, and defining oneself internally and through exchanges with other people and episodes that take place. Thus, it is essential for symbolic interactionism to include both perspective on how people interrelate and how an individual creates his or her own reality (p. 26-34).

Swingewood (1991) points to Mead's thinking about the 'I/Me' dichotomy, which enables people to create meaning for themselves and the broader world through the interpretation of common symbols:

The self is thus individual only through its reciprocal relations with others and with the community. The self is both a subject and an object, the 'I' as the subject which thinks and acts, the 'Me' as the individual's awareness of self as an object in the world existing for others. (p. 266)

Charon (2004) argues, "Almost all social interaction is symbolic; thus we get to the meaning of 'symbolic interactionism': the study of human beings interacting symbolically with one another and with themselves, and in the process of that symbolic interaction making decisions and directing their stream of action" (p. 151). Every action that we perform has meaning to us. Observers of our actions will also find meaning in all our actions, although their interpretations and meanings may differ from ours.

Via symbolic interactionism, people create meaning for and about themselves and the world around them. These identities are important because they explain why people do what they do, how and why they communicate, and how people create impressions of one another (Charon, 2004, p. 160).

From a business perspective, symbolic interactionism demonstrates that all

communication and interactions taking place between corporations and audiences creates the identity of the organisation. Communicators play an important role in shaping the identity of an organisation through social interaction. For example, if practitioners want the public to identify a hospital as the best hospital in the area, then the speech and actions of the hospital board of directors, doctors, and staff need to emulate that identity. It is through the interactions of the hospital staff with the audiences that the hospital's identity is shaped. Interactions can take place face-to-face, through social media, or traditional media.

Sociodrama

Duncan (1985) developed a symbol-based theory derived from symbolic interactionism, called sociodrama (Mickey, 2008, p. 125). Mickey (1995) employed sociodrama as a means to help public relations practitioners better understand how language helps publics relate to an organisation and to identify with the organisation in a common drama. The focus on language enables sociodrama to be studied from a cultural perspective. Mickey (1995) explains, "We interact with one another through symbol. It is the symbol, mostly language, to which we give meaning. In the process we become part of a social order greater than ourselves (a family, a community, an organization)" (p. 9).

Using sociodrama as a theoretical lens, Mickey hoped to transform public relations from a one-way to a two-way transmission field that values the input of an audience and uses that input to craft future output (Mickey, 1995, p. 1). As a result, sociodrama may be viewed as a more humanistic approach to theory, making it easier for practitioners to relate to and apply sociodrama to their communication efforts. The notion that both individuals and organisations employ acting roles is easily comprehended in contemporary society, so heavily influenced by popular culture. Mickey (1995) explains, "Social interaction is not a process, but a dramatic expression, an enactment of roles by individuals who seek to identify with each other in their search for social order" (p. 35).

Radical interactionism

Athens derived the theory radical interactionism from the pioneering work of Mead because he deduced that symbolic interaction fell short in explaining the central role power and dominance play in social acts (Athens, 2009). The theory reveals that power and dominance are always prevalent, even in the most democratic societies and institutions. Athens (2002, 2007 & 2009) demonstrates that power and domination play a central role in human communities, whether person-to-person or person-to-organisation. Domination is the “construction of complex social actions through some participants in the social act performing superordinate roles, other participants performing subordinate roles, and everyone assuming the attitudes of ‘others’” (Athens, 2007, p. 141). As this statement attests, the role each player assumes is critical, but they are not necessarily static.

In the cyclical nature of the social action, a party that is superordinate may also take a subordinate role and vice-versa depending on the given action. Athens (2009) explains that humans only accept domination under certain conditions: “the question is not whether we wish to be dominated, but only under what conditions – how, when, where, and from whom – we are willing to accept it” (p. 407). In defining ‘domination’, it is important from a radical interactionism perspective to understand that this does not have to be physical dominance or necessarily a negative connotation of the word. Domination occurs when “an individual or group participating in a social act steers the direction of its development, according to their particular preferences” (Athens, 2010, p. 341).

Method: Developing radical sociodrama

Radical sociodrama extends our understanding of sociodrama and radical interactionism by placing power relations at the heart of societal interactions, particularly between organisations and publics focusing on language, signs, and symbols. Power and domination are central facets of radical sociodrama, demonstrating how a corporation exerts influence via typical public relations

work, such as press releases, strategic plans, quarterly earnings reports, and other channels that may be grouped under the encompassing ‘marketing’ umbrella in most large organisations.

Radical sociodrama, then, is a tool for examining communications that privileges power and domination as enacted by superordinate and subordinate factions engaged in complex social actions. Rather than obfuscate or deny that power and domination are at the heart of communications, which leads to difficult discussions regarding ethics, persuasion, rhetoric, and manipulation that the public relations field typically shies away from, radical sociodrama identifies these factors as paramount in understanding how organisations communicate. Domination, according to Athens (2010), “tints to one degree or another all our social acts and, thereby, pervades every corner of our social existence” (p. 351).

The authors use deconstruction to develop the theory of radical sociodrama. Mickey (2003) argues that this critical lens provides scholars with a method of getting at deeply held meanings, explaining, “Deconstructing means to see ideas that rest under the surface of the material we have produced – to peel away the layers that are in front of us but often hidden until we look” (p. 1).

Sociodrama demonstrates the importance of language, however without the addition of radical interactionism it is impossible to explain how powerful that language is based on the superordinate or subordinate role of the communicator. Via deconstruction and the combination of the two critical theories, radical sociodrama serves as an effective tool in analysing the role power plays in public relations transactions.

Public relations, according to Mickey (2003), “exists only in practice, in what social actors do, in what has become a way to do public relations. All practices in the culture are constructions of language and symbol, and thus are representations of power” (p. 6). Deconstruction then becomes a practical tool for both public relations scholars and professionals because it perpetually forces them to examine the words and materials of social

actors, to determine the type of power relationships being established.

The authors next used deconstruction and single case study research to examine a sample of Starbucks' promotional materials. In particular, the researchers investigated the assumed meanings contained in Starbucks' annual reports and the bestselling memoir/corporate histories written by Starbucks' chief executive officer Howard Schultz.

A single case study design allows the researcher to undertake a deep exploration of a phenomenon with limited breadth, while a multiple case study approach produces a more diluted analysis, but allows the researcher to highlight themes across the cases, create a list of lessons learned, and compare and contrast the cases (Daymon & Holloway, 2011, p. 119). Since the aim of this article is to determine the role that language and power played in the success of Starbucks' transactions with consumers, the authors pursued a single case study. The research focuses on analysing material produced by a single corporation, to illustrate the tight link between Starbucks and radical sociodrama.

The limitations of this approach centre on the relatively few aspects of the corporation's public relations and marketing total output the authors studied. Future research undertaken regarding Starbucks and other organisations could strengthen the theoretical foundation of radical sociodrama by examining marketing materials in greater depth. These materials could include: product packaging, press releases, strategic plans, and website content, among other forms of marketing materials. By analysing a broader range of communications data, researchers examining Starbucks or another organisation will establish more persuasive argument for the usefulness of radical sociodrama.

Creating a Starbucks culture

Starbucks artfully and purposely develops and maintains an organisational culture with which customers and stakeholders identify. In essence, Starbucks created its own community, driven and expressed by symbols

and language, built on the shared aspirations of its customers, who come to view the store and its meanings as a way of life. The Starbucks' lifestyle helps patrons not only understand themselves, but also become a version of themselves through the symbols, ideas, and ideologies that the corporation values. Ruzich (2008) explains, "Starbucks' attempts to recreate the social experiences and communal rituals of Italian cafes and British pubs have been aided by company language designed to foster feelings of belonging and connection" (p. 436).

Schultz (2011), the mastermind behind the creation and legacy of the Starbucks culture, is direct in attributing the company's culture to love, saying, "There is a word that comes to my mind when I think about our company and our people. That word is 'love'. I love Starbucks because everything we've tried to do is steeped in humanity" (p. 4). Schultz's writing actively and purposely created a brand and company narrative that he felt would attract customers: "We take something ordinary and infuse it with emotion and meaning, and then we tell its story over and over and over again, often without saying a word" (Schultz, 2011, p. 12).

Creating a common drama

What one finds in Starbucks stores in the U.S. and worldwide is a template, or sameness, that many customers find comforting. From the familiar logo to the dark wood interiors and constant smell of coffee beans, Starbucks provides reassurance to coffee drinkers regardless of location, perhaps even a bit of home as they travel. Schultz (2011) describes this feeling as "the Starbucks Experience – [based on] personal connection – is an affordable necessity. We are all hungry for community" (p. 13). The importance is built around connecting with others and reconnecting, according to Schultz, with oneself (p. 13).

Whether one views Starbucks as a crafty corporate power manipulating customers' attitudes to sell coffee or a valuable community resource, the creation of an environment that represents shared visions is a hallmark of the company's communication success. Mickey (1995) explains, "Communication, and public

relations specifically, does not involve giving someone a message, but instead identifies with others in a common drama” (p. 40). ‘Drama’ implies that the corporation uses theatrical or expressive forms to communicate with stakeholders. In contemporary society, the public relations efforts cannot seem one-way, so Starbucks also provides avenues for consumers to engage, whether as one of 31 million Facebook fans, or via the ‘My Starbucks Idea’ page on its corporate website, which enables the public to suggest ways to improve products, services, or new ways to engage with the community.

By interacting with the public, Starbucks temporarily hands over its superordinate role, but does so in an agreeable way for all parties. Additionally, by allowing consumers to feel engaged with corporate representatives over multiple channels, Starbucks learns valuable information for future efforts at creating common dramas.

Corporations create messages with a goal in mind – to inform, persuade, or motivate audiences to consider the message and then perform some action or change attitude. Thus, messages must contain the elements of drama (act, actor, scene, means, and purpose) to achieve the desired outcome. Mickey (2008) emphasises that those behind the scenes (message producers) should be considered, as well as those on the stage and outside the theatre (p. 130). A powerful message with all the dramatic elements in place will reach the target audience and lead to them being persuaded, informed, motivated, and willing to share their excitement with others.

Starbucks’ use of signs and symbols

According to Mickey (1995), professional communicators are “dealing with human beings who think, feel, and interact through symbols (primarily language) in order to achieve their personal and common goals” (p. 3). It is through everyday conversations that people relate to their peers. It is through language that they explain themselves, justify, persuade, motivate, and inform.

Duncan (1968) wrote, “By ‘significant symbol’ we mean a symbol which not only

‘signals’ to or ‘stimulates’ another, but also arouses in the self the same meaning it does in others” (p. 44). Through language, people relate to and understand one another. Charon (2004) explained that human beings are socialised through symbols; it is through these symbols that individuals learn to share the same values, ideas, and rules of the society (p. 62). Thus, language is the vehicle for social interaction, and in one’s everyday conversations he or she uses symbols to present drama to peers.

The goal for public relations practitioners is to use the language of their target audience, so the audience will be able to identify with them and allow for the interaction to take place. The language a public relations professional utilises also helps to determine the organisation’s place within the social order of society. Practitioners, therefore, should engage with publics via language that mirrors society’s values, rules, and ideas.

What baffles many observers is how Starbucks straddles a fuzzy line between the fact that it is a global business enterprise and simultaneously a site that people equate with community, philanthropy, and social consciousness. In comparison, any number of corporations have attempted to do the same and largely failed, including Wal-Mart, Nike, and McDonald’s. Ruzich (2008) analyses the dichotomy:

Starbucks’ challenge lies in the balancing of two contradictory identities: it wants to become an ever-expanding multinational corporation and retain the image of a friendly small business. The company’s in-store language can be viewed as a rhetorical solution to the dilemma, an attempt to sustain the myth of the non-commercial coffee house, denying consumerism while creating visions of community and connection. (p. 438)

Dominance

The first sentence of the Starbucks website page ‘Our Heritage’ reads: “Every day, we go to work hoping to do two things: share great coffee with our friends and help make the world a little better” (n.d.). Although one might scoff at how a fast food coffee shop could

actually enact this hope, like the company's mission statement, it speaks to the culture Starbucks has created. The accompanying picture provides a counter-level view of the Starbucks logo with the words 'Espresso' and 'Cappuccino' in neon.

Looking closer at this single line, however, one sees how Starbucks employs language in establishing a power position in relation to its customers, employees, and stakeholders by simultaneously aspiring to great heights, but using words that speak to common dreams. Ultimately, breaking the sentence into smaller parts reveals its power and demonstrates the corporation's success in building a brand around language.

Immediately, the narrative begins with "we," rather than "Starbucks" or something generic such as "our employees". This language draws the reader into a common bond with the unnamed corporate entity or person speaking these lines. In addition, the statement hinges on the commitment of "every day" and "work". Americans pride themselves on hard work and dedication that leads to fulfilment of the American Dream. Furthermore, rather than "sell" or "offer" coffee to its customers, the narrative explains that the company "hopes" to "share great coffee with our friends". Again, this use of language, along with a sharp photograph in deep browns, speaks to ideas that resonate with consumers. There is no 'hard sell' taking place at this website. Instead, the reader is treated to a narrative written as if the corporation is a dear friend. Rather than aspirational, the language employed is personal, comrade-to-comrade.

The next part of the sentence elevates the goal to making the world a better place. While on one hand lofty, this phrasing appeals to many readers who pride themselves on perseverance. The national call for Americans to make the nation and the world a better place is invoked. As a result, this clarion call enables Starbucks to use utopian language that speaks to the aspirational mind-set of readers.

Starbucks is successful here because it uses language to position itself as a

superordinate provider of the American Dream, a lifestyle that people still desperately hope to achieve, despite the constant challenges associated with global warfare and economic collapse. Consumers begin to associate Starbucks with the American ideal, and in order to fill the emptiness they consume a product that they feel is the epitome of the ideal American lifestyle.

This example can be carried out even further. Because Starbucks has been able to create a utopia for American consumers it has also afforded itself the ability to make assumptions about its consumers. Essentially, Starbucks has become aware of consumers' willingness to carry out subordinate roles. Athens (2002) explains:

More specifically, they merely become aware of each other's readiness to carry out their respective superordinate or subordinate roles in the prospective social act in which they are jointly participating. Moreover, through people's assumptions of each other's attitudes, those who will perform the subordinate roles can anticipate the separate line of actions of those who will perform the superordinate ones, and vice versa, in the joint act. (p. 36)

Athens (2002) argues that consumers are willing accept their subordinate roles because the benefits that Starbucks provides them is worth the relinquishment of power and dominance. He argues:

On the one hand, if the people who want to perform the superordinate roles in the social act display superior attitudes toward those who are to perform the subordinate roles, and those who are to perform the subordinate roles exhibit subservient attitudes back towards those who want to perform the superordinate ones, then they have formed a compatible plan of action for its construction. (p. 35)

Simply, Starbucks has created the ultimate producer-consumer relationship. Both Starbucks and its consumers know and accept their roles.

Conclusion

As a result of this research it is clear that Starbucks has achieved financial success for two reasons. First, the company excels at building relationships with customers and other stakeholders through language and symbols. Second, Starbucks uses language and symbols to exercise power. The development of radical sociodrama advances our understanding of power in public relations by demonstrating how corporations use language and symbols to exert domination in exchange with consumers and stakeholders. While research reveals that 'power' is often a problem for public relations practitioners, Smudde and Courtright (2007) conclude, "The power of public relations is rhetorical, as it relies on the skillfulness of people, as corporate symbolic actors, to inspire cooperation between an organization and its publics" (p. 267). From this perspective, the creation of a distinct culture built around the Starbucks brand provides an innovative way to look at organisational power.

Mickey explains, "The primary idea is that language that we use in public relations constructs and reflects our relationship with the client. So that it is not an accidental language, it is very carefully crafted in order to construct and define a relationship" (personal communication, 11 November 2010). Therefore, the key concept in sociodrama is that corporations create relationships in discourse or in conversation through language. It is through this language that corporations and consumers begin to identify with one another and social order is created. However, in order for social order to exist, subordinate and superordinate roles must be fulfilled. Those who have less power fulfil the subordinate roles and must succumb to the culture and language of those with more power, fulfilling the superordinate roles.

The key factors determining who fulfils what roles are power and dominance. Clegg, Courpasson, and Phillips (2006) reason, "Power is ultimately about the choices we make, the actions we take, the evils we tolerate, the good we define, the privileges we

bestow, the rights we claim, and the wrongs we do. Power means finding the most effective leverage for particular relations" (p. 3). Corporations use power to leverage relationships with consumers. Language and symbols provide corporations with the ability to convince subordinates (consumers) to tolerate their evils and grant them privileges and rights to do the things they do. Thus, power is key to corporations achieving financial success.

It is important to note that dominance typically has a negative connotation. However, as Athens (2002, 2009) points out, dominance, in social acts, is as assured as death and taxes, and all complex social acts cannot be completed without the element of dominance. Similarly Clegg et al. (2006) observe, "Power is to organization as oxygen is to breathing" (p. 3). Thus, this research aims to shed light on complex social acts that take place between corporations and consumers. It also explains why consumers willingly accept subordinate roles in consumer culture. Most importantly, the research helps to justify why, how, when, where, and from whom consumers accept and essentially support the dominance imposed on them by organisations.

Starbucks uses symbols and language to create a community based on aspirations. Consumers yearn to live a Starbucks lifestyle, so they voluntarily adopt the language and actively participate in the drama that Starbucks creates. They desire to be a part of the Starbucks culture and participate in the company's vision of the American Dream. The intense desire to be a member of the Starbucks community demonstrated by consumers defines term 'brand loyalty'. However, Ruzich (2008) cautions, "Consumers who patronize the chain should examine the in-store language for what it is – an advertising campaign, which to be successful must have an element of truth, but which, like all advertising, should be scrutinized and recognized as a high-stakes effort to manipulate, persuade, and sell" (p. 440).

Radical sociodrama advances our understanding of why consumers are willing to look past this manipulation and persuasion and continue to purchase consumer goods produced

by corporations. Starbucks provides a good example of the conditions under which consumers accept power and dominance. Consumers look past manipulation and persuasion if they relate to the language and symbols the corporation employs. Radical sociodrama views language like a mirror, it reflects who the consumers are and why they are interested in connecting with a corporation. The more a corporation is able to reflect the consumer in the language it creates, the more willing consumers will be to grant power and dominance back to the organisation.

Radical sociodrama expands on radical interactionism and sociodrama as a means to examine how and why consumers are willing to be dominated by large corporations. Research on radical sociodrama is in its infancy, but is developed at the intersection of two sociological theories that help observers better understand how societies and communities work. Future research on radical sociodrama has great promise as it is applied to other industries and stakeholders.

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