MARKETING & THE HUMAN CONDITION - PAPER 02

THREE PATHS TO SIGNIFICANCE

Create, Borrow, Evoke

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SIGNIFICANCE: AN AUTONOMOUS MECHANISM

Paying more attention to what gains your attention is a worthwhile endeavour. It can uncover a deeper understanding of the current orientation of your perception of the world.

It’s also the first step towards changing that orientation.

THREE PATHS TO SIGNIFICANCE

ANYTHING THAT HAS CAPTURED YOUR ATTENTION, NO MATTER HOW SMALL, YOU DEEMED SIGNIFICANT.

YOU JUST MIGHT NOT HAVE KNOWN WHY.

CONSIDERING...

EVERY DAY THOUSANDS OF THINGS COMPETE FOR OUR ATTENTION.
ALMOST ALL DISAPPEAR.
AND ONLY SOME REMAIN...

THE INTERESTING QUESTION ISN'T WHAT CAPTURED OUR ATTENTION.

IT'S WHY & HOW THAT SIGNIFICANCE EMERGED IN THE FIRST PLACE.

THERE ARE THREE PATHS TO SIGNIFICANCE

ROUTE ONE
BORROWED SIGNIFICANCE

Some things matter because they are connected to things that already matter.

MEANING THROUGH ASSOCIATION

Some things become significant because they become associated with things that already matter.

Wearing a Rolex → Success.
Wearing a Suit → Authority.
An Oxbridge degree → Academic prestige.

Their significance is shaped by what they have come to represent.
Part of their meaning was inherited from something that already mattered.

Very few things become significant in isolation.
Definition: Borrowed significance is inherited.
Meaning transfers through association rather than being earned.

ROUTE TWO
CREATED SIGNIFICANCE

Where meaning is earned.

MEANING THROUGH CREATION

Some things become significant by creating meaning that did not previously exist. Over time, significance is earned through repeated experience, usefulness, beauty or shared belief.

Apple → Innovation
Shakespeare → Literary greatness
Rolls-Royce → Engineering excellence

Their significance was built, not bestowed.

Each earned it over time.

Definition: Created significance is earned.
It accumulates through repeated experience, usefulness, beauty or shared belief.

BUT...
NOT ALL SIGNIFICANCE IS INHERITED.
NOT ALL SIGNIFICANCE IS EARNED.
SOME SIGNIFICANCE IS SIMPLY REMEMBERED.

ROUTE THREE
EVOKED SIGNIFICANCE

Awakening significance that already exists.

MEANING THROUGH EVOCATION

Some things become significant because they awaken something that already exists within us.

Christmas adverts → Nostalgia
Interstellar → Awe
A sunset → wonder

None of these create significance. None of these borrow it. They reveal significance that already existed within us.

Definition: Evoked significance is awakened.
It brings meaning that was already there into focus.

EVOKED SIGNIFICANCE COULD BE CONSIDERED THE DEEPEST KIND OF SIGNIFICANCE

The deepest significance isn't created. It's recognised.

IT SPEAKS TO SOMETHING THAT ALREADY LIVES INSIDE US

Significance doesn't always exist in the thing being communicated.
Sometimes it already exists inside the audience. Communication simply awakens it.

Most communication tries to manufacture meaning.
The deepest communication doesn't invent what we care about. It reveals it.

Think about:
John Lewis → Family
Nike → Greatness
Dove → Self-worth

THREE ROUTES TO SIGNIFICANCE

Everything that becomes significant is inherited, earned or awakened.

Borrowed → Inherited

Created → Earned

Evoked → Awakened

THREE ROUTES TO SIGNIFICANCE

Route	Mechanism	Definition
Association	Inherited	Borrowed significance is inherited.
Creation	Earned	Created significance is earned.
Evocation	Awakened	Evoked significance is awakened.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR PATH TO SIGNIFICANCE

Every act of communication must first pass the gate of significance.
It can do that in one of three ways.

- Borrow significance.
- Create significance.
- Evoke significance that already exists.

Understanding which path you're taking gives your communication a better chance of passing through the gate.