

The Power of the Apple Promise: A Content Analysis of the World's Most Valuable Brand

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In October 2014, Interbrand, a leading global branding agency, announced that Apple—the world's most valuable company—was for the second year in a row also the world's most valuable brand. The valuation of 118 billion USD is a testament to the competitive strength of Apple's brand, the key role it plays in purchasing decisions, and the financial success of the company's products and services. Apple's brand seems particularly powerful when you consider its resilience in light of the litany of scandals that have plagued the company in recent years, including and not limited to: labor violations and abuses at suppliers, ecological destruction and toxic environmental pollution, price-fixing, and tax evasion. To understand the precise nature of the power of Apple's brand, and how it continues to successfully obscure the hidden costs of how the company does business, I conducted with a team of research assistants a content analysis on most of Apple's print and television advertising in the US from 1976 through the present. We systematically coded and analyzed over 500 unique pieces of data. What emerged is a clear picture of the values and emotions that anchor Apple's brand, and the compelling brand promise the company makes to its customers. In addition to selling beautiful, innovative, highly practical products, Apple sells the promise of connection, belonging, innovation, personal success, and hope for a better future, via the suggested marriage of consumer electronics with our personal and private lives. The totality of Apple's brand promise speaks sociological volumes about the values and aspirations of the contemporary US population, and in doing so, sheds light on the social and cultural desires fulfilled by the company. This is an important revelation because it helps illuminate what activists and reformers must offer to US consumers to convince them to shift out of the socially, environmentally, and economically destructive cycle of consumer-capitalism.