

THE BRAND AESTHETICS MODEL: RECONCILING DESIGNERS AND MARKETERS ON BRAND MANAGEMENT

Brigitte Borja de Mozota

Parsons Paris School of Art + Design, Université Paris Ouest France

ABSTRACT

A brand is a concept invented by marketing. Consequently, marketing publications avoid mentioning the role of designers in creating, developing and managing brands. This is a paradox, as it is common knowledge that designers and design consultancies are working on brands in their everyday activities.

Designers, on the other end, tend to use the concept of brand identity and brand signature in order to define their input in brand positioning. Therefore, they are reinforcing a marketing view of design as an activity, useful for ideas in order to give form to the brand. This does not convey, however, the global role of designers in value creativity, emotion and customer experience through branding.

Our aim in this paper is to share a conceptual model of brand aesthetics that we have been using in both business and education at the postgraduate level. The model extends existing brand models, and explores successively the various steps of brand management from creation to development, and from revitalization to brand evaluation. It explains the inputs, the methods and the skills of the two professions of marketing and design, step by step.

In conclusion, the brand aesthetics model reconciles the two professions. Through this framework, both professionals communicate better. Marketers are more aware of design being a process, and a research-based profession beyond mere creative/graphic skills. Designers are more aware of the key concepts of brand management such as brand positioning, brand architecture, brand protection and brand evaluation. Under the same theoretical framework, the 'brand aesthetics model' merges the specific knowledge of each profession.

Keywords: Brand, Design, Brand management, Design skills, Design protection

1. INTRODUCTION

The domains of brand and design are close to each other, but the frontier remains unexplored by both marketing research and design research. A brand cannot exist without design, but researchers specialized in branding tend to ignore this fact. This is paradoxical since a large majority of design professionals are working, in their everyday practice, with brand specialists as well as communicating to their corporate clients as brand experts.

A brand is a name and a series of symbols and signs - all of which can be protected legally. Other signs that, together, create the territory of the brand enrich the signs, created by designers often working with naming experts. The brand and its logo live on various supports; its graphic signature is integrated on communication documents and web sites but also on other forms such as packaging, products or spaces. The brand design becomes a system, either in 2D or in 3D.

All those forms that make up the universe of a brand, such as products, packaging, sales areas, and websites, are all points of contact between consumers and their favorite brands. The designers provide a value to the brand that must be defined in relation to concepts that define brand marketing. The designer, by his knowledge and his ability to create signs, participates in challenging existing brands on the shift from a transactional brand to a relational brand. None of the concepts or any of the theories that define the scope of the brand escapes the questioning role of the designer.

We begin by presenting the fundamental concepts of design and of branding, then by presenting a model of "Brand Aesthetics" which attempts to define the place of design by setting it up as an idea and marking it down in action. This aesthetic model of the brand is a proposed representation of the actual links between the fields of marketing and design. It helps to understand that the brands are, first and foremost, tangible forms and then mental images in the minds of consumers. Brand image starts with brand perception. A brand is first "a mark".

2. FUNDAMENTALS OF BRAND DEFINITION

In marketing, the brand may be perceived from different approaches, according to the phases of its history and its definitions. How can we qualify the concepts of the brand and define the role of design in this universe?

A comparative overview of approaches to brand

Each approach to the brand represents a definition of brand as well as an approach to brand design (Table 1).

Table 1: Brand definitions in marketing and in design

| Approaches to brand in marketing | Brand definition | Approaches to brand in design |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Function | The brand identifies The brand differentiates | Brand design is a marker |
| Consumer behavior | The brand is useful in a process of consumer choice | Brand design is a differentiator |
| Communication | The brand's narrative Brand as discourse | Brand design is an idea and a story |
| Values | The brand as imprint The brand as meaning | Brand design communicates a message which has meaning |
| Innovation | The brand innovates | Brand design is driven by innovation |
| Aesthetic | The brand as form or shape | Brand designs constitute a unique aesthetic language |
| Financial | Spontaneous associations & future sales potential The assets value of the brand | Brand design creates a mental image that helps in building the brand equity |

This summary table between the different conceptual approaches to brand and design shows that the fields overlap. For marketers as for designers, the brand is a marker, a story, a discourse, an innovation, a meaning and a financial value.

Yet design adds an additional approach (in bold) – the aesthetic approach – and a definition of the brand as a form. The design of the brand, its form and tangible characteristics, is the output of the design creative process as brand function, brand communication, brand innovation, brand value.

Example: Barack Obama 2008 US presidential campaign sent a message of hope, change and “Yes we can” to the citizens of the world. Goals were to develop a visual identity for an American presidential candidate that:

- *express the candidate's vision and core values*
- *build brand recognition in a competitive field*
- *transcend traditional political campaign strategy*

Obama chief political strategist retained Sol Sender and his firm Sender LCC to design the campaign identity. Sender read Obama's two books and conducted an audit of presidential campaign branding over the past hundred years to determine how the identity should depart from traditional patriotic language.

Creative solution: like the candidate the identity needed to be inclusive of all Americans.

The designer decided on an iconic symbol based on “O”; the simplicity of the symbol facilitated use in a variety of applications. So popular was the symbol that people made it their own spontaneously applying it to everything imaginable. John Stabyk created extensions of the symbol for different constituencies “[Wheeler 2009]

This “form” and tangible character of the brand complements the marketing approaches of attributes and gives a space for a more systemic approach of all the brand artefacts. And the form or brand features exist “upstream” as soon as the brand is created.

Thus, systemically, the fields of design and branding intersect at the level of brand creation, its history or brand idea, and not just at the level of perception and impact on behavior. For example, a marketing study on the impact of color on consumer behavior is a study on form, and therefore part of design research step in the design process.

Marketing creates a unique and exclusive brand for a market or market segment. The brand is a name first, and then design gives it a graphic form and, later, may associate it with a symbol and/or artifact forms.

The brand becomes by its use a reference inscribed in the minds of its customers and prospective customers. The design of the brand imprints this mental image in the minds of customers. The brand is, then, a strategic market player in a clearly defined competitive field.

The name and design of the brand guarantees this differentiation in the market. The brand, and the Brand design, is a promise of external value for the organization, as well as a tool for internal managerial consensus.

The brand is mental marker that relies on tangible and intangible values [Lewi 2005]

The Brand design is involved in the construction of the tangible and intangible values of the brand.

- The tangible values of the brand are in the marking function. The function of the brand is based on tangible artifacts such as: product, price, distribution channel, with sensory perception. These tangible artifacts are perceived and measurable in terms of value both by marketing and design.
- The intangible values are communication elements, from the brand mental imprint. The brand is a narrative for the client with its history, its symbols, and its associated values.

Thus, what is called the brand identity is a common concept for design and marketing, and advertising in particular.

3. THE VARIOUS PHASES OF BRAND DESIGN

In the beginning was the product. If we go back to the sources, brands were built on the values of the product and thus on innovation. Product design is involved in the creation of the product and, then, graphic design complements the brand system. The product enables the brand; these product attributes are the first elements of brand identity. Depending on the type of product, other design disciplines will be used such as packaging or retail design in addition to product and engineering design.

But, this vision of the brand as product belongs to the past, and it also corresponds to the functional dimension of the brand, to a rational view and, therefore, favors the “cognitive” axis of creation of brand identity.

Example Pantene “The brand has created an identity presenting itself as the authority on healthy hair. its leadership position has been achieved by delivering a benefit tied to beauty through health. This approach leverages not only the established category mandate on promised beautiful hair but has also stretched beyond this meaning to include a strategic health benefit ,which is more powerful and proprietary position in this high –involvement category “ [Kathman. 2010]

Then, brands enter another phase in which emotions are privileged. The client is looking for an emotional experience. This phase is that of communication, and brand management will rely primarily on advertising or experience design. This speaks also to brand packaging. The emotional axis is privileged in brand management at the risk of transforming this product differentiation strategy into an artificial or cosmetic tool. In this phase, the aim is to develop a brand image.

Finally, brands attain maturity and go back to fundamentals, in which the brand is building a relationship towards brand equity. One must focus on building the relationship between business, brand and customer. The privileged axis is that which focuses on the relationship axis and/or builds trust across all elements of contact -touchpoints - between the clients, the staff and the brand.

“Our customer journey tool uses Personas and their journeys through the brand touch points to create brand interaction themes for each Persona; these themes are used to brainstorm on the specific relationship the brand has with that specific Persona; a brainstorm then focuses on how new touchpoints can contribute to building that relationship.”[Roscamo al 2010]

What makes the brand is the constant renewal of quality and product performance, innovation and business ethics. Thus, brand is dependent on the quality of marketing but also on R & D and design. Communication investment only is not sufficient

The first requirement of the consumer faced with a brand is quality, then innovation. The link between design and brand changes according to the phase of the brand development and proceeds more according to perceived quality rather than logo alone. It covers all the points of construction of the "brand equity" or brand capital.

Brand design management is more like orchestration of all design disciplines according to the brand values. Product design ,communication design ,retail design ,web design ,service design and the behavior of employees all have to be in tune.

Moreover, the boundary between product and service becomes increasingly blurred, which means that 3D design disciplines (product, space) must collaborate with 2D design disciplines (graphic design, website, publishing) to build consistency between all points of contact between the customer and brand. All design disciplines will participate in the brand building not just graphic design.

Brand designs will even help in building integration between product and service, and in innovating in the number and quality of services offered. Customers are outsourcing more and more, and services are all points of construction of emotion and relationship with the brand. The multiplication of these brand experiences can mean a loss of control for brand management, but design signature provides an overall coherence.

Design helps one to see the complex brand system, and gives it a holistic view, keeping in mind that perception is always global. And that perception or aesthetics comes first:

- Aesthetics sensorial layer: how the product looks
- Behavioral layer: how the product feels
- Functional layer: what the product does
- Physical layer: how the product is made
- Mental layer: what the product means

The layers correspond with the way the user comes into contact with and experiences designed brand touch points. Design plays a specific role for each layer of the brand. [Roscam & al 2010]

4. BRAND IDENTITY, A CENTRAL CORE COMMON TO MARKETING AND DESIGN

As the different steps of the brand emphasize the design process, one of the three axes of form is privileged: cognition, emotion, and relationship.

Similarly, the functions of the brand for the consumer will correspond to the three dimensions in the creation of a form.

- -the transactional function of the brand for the consumer or benchmark corresponds to the dimension of cognition, or proportion of formal creation.
- The aspirational function or reducing brand boredom corresponds to the dimension of emotion, seeking to create meaning.

“Design is creating emotion in the brand.” -- Marc Gobé, Emotional Branding

“The business world needs logic, while the consumer world is driven by emotion. Brandjamming is the powerful idea that reconnects both worlds. Brandjam by creating products that satisfy unmet emotional needs. The reality is that brands no longer belong to corporations but to people who vote for them with their wallets in a new consumer democracy. Design, not unlike jazz, is innovation in action; it stimulates people’s senses and emotions to create preferences

Graphics would be tailored for consumers according to our famous emotional lens: an emotional need to be reassured (Head) ,the desire to be socially and culturally involved (Heart) and the craving for visceral engagement (Gut) “ [Gobé 2007]

- the relational function reduces anxiety and perceived risk, and corresponds to the research of use and dimension of the relationship in creation. The design of the brand is involved in different types of brand relations: social links , experiential or sensory links, discursive links, and technological links through e-branding and Customer Relationship Management.

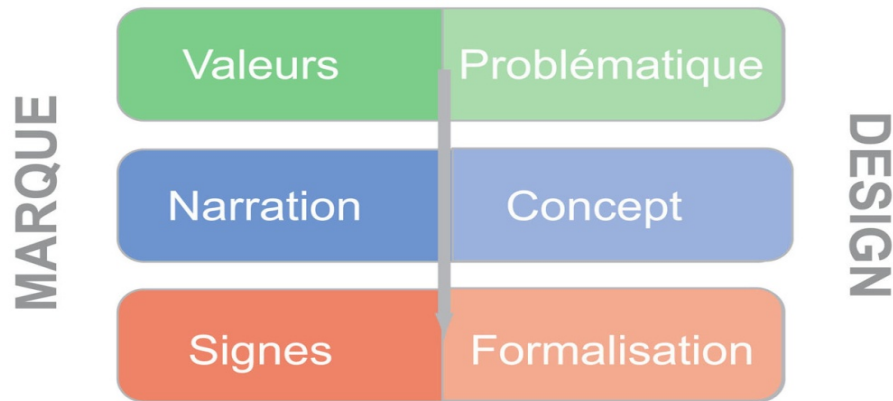


Figure 1: Brand design: from values to evidence (Design K.Cotellon)

Brand identity is a mental puzzle, consisting of three components: (figure 1)

- SIGNS/ (fr: signes):the product or service that defines the universe of the brand and its formalization(fr: formalisation)
- NARRATION(narration): the relationship with the consumer that defines the brand personality, the concept (fr:concept)
- VALUES (fr: valeurs): the social role of the brand that defines the system of values and standards and the problem to solve by design (fr: problématique)

Brand design is involved in all these three components of brand identity. The aesthetics of the brand lies in the idea or the ideology behind the tangible.

The definitions of brand identity vary according to whether they adopt a viewpoint of transmission or reception. There are two poles in building identity:

- the perceived identity or brand image
- the desired identity or proposed idea or brand

Any auditing of brand design, as in a brand marketing audit, compares these two poles: desired versus perceived.

4.1. Brand design as narrative

Brand is a narrative contract that is based on three levels, as a sign of codified agreement between the company and its consumer:

How a little bit of yellow jazzed up the Coca Cola brand: " The new design had a far greater impact than anticipated because consumers responded so well initially ...The new packaging design also helped shift the internal culture at Coca Cola.That little bit of yellow backed by a floating ribbon unleashed the energy native of the brand, this emotional design did not reinvent the brand but it released the latent potential within its image, its audience and its company; in short the emotional energy of the brand was brought to life".[Gobé 2007]

- the axiological level, or the foundation of brand values
- the discourse level or the most visible part: each story is staged in a discourse of figurative elements that are readily understandable and identifiable.

- the attributive level, or the transition from marketing to communication: when the values and qualities of the brand have a strong resonance with a specific category of consumers.

4.2. Brand design and consumer behavior and trends

Brand design is concerned with consumer behavior because it is inseparable from the perception of the offer by the consumer. It gives evidence of attitudes, as well as trends and lifestyle choices, to the consumer. This whole perception created by design leads the consumer to act, or not, in a certain way.

“Trends are formed by changes in political, environmental, social, technological and economic (PESTE) factors. Understanding changes in PESTE factors, provides better clues to future trend and future customer values and thus brand futures” [KIM 2006]

Brand design is involved in the perception process behind the consumer selection, the process of categorization and interpretation. However, it is also subject to internal and external influences:

Internal influences are emotional reactions, more or less important according to the respect given by consumer to each brand. The aesthetic or brand design will participate in these emotional reactions. The value-added design will transform this emotional reaction to a positive attitude. This

External influences are those such as lifestyle, culture or attitude towards innovation, and are involved in the process of design creation, reinforcing or not the motivation and involvement of the consumer with each brand.

5. TOWARDS A MODEL OF BRAND DESIGN OR "BRAND AESTHETICS"

The emergence of design in brand management -and innovation management - has resulted into design as a department or function in organizations. The new design function is either seen as artistic direction in fashion and luxury, or as design direction in automotive and other sectors; this raises many issues of coordination with other functions of the organization.

Among these new links to build, we must mention in particular the coordination of design function with the brand management. For example, in Decathlon/Oxylane, design management has created the position of "brand design manager" who is responsible for consistency between the brand management and design management [Borja de Mozota 2003].

This coordinated management of both brand and design should be thought of at each stage of building the brand and of the creative process. Hence emerged the idea for research of considering a common model, in which a diagram represents the steps and decisions to take into consideration from both brand values and other design inputs.

It therefore seems justified to explore a joint model of brand management and brand design, as the existing models do not take into account the bridge between brand and design. This holistic approach to the design process and brand management is coherent with brand objectives and value.

These bridges between design and brand have been explored in a previous study [Borja de Mozota & Sabon, 2004]. We propose now a complete model, to explore the relationships between design and brand in order to combine both into the creation of brand management.

6. THE "BRAND AESTHETICS" MODEL

The proposed "Brand Aesthetics" model covers the main points discussed in this article (Table 3).

It revolves around:

- four-levels of building the brand: definition, identity, image, and brand equity
- three levels of brand decision: strategic, tactical, and operational
- the various stages of the design process: intention, narrative, principles, and creation.
- finally, the design tools according to each of these steps.

Table 2: The Brand Aesthetics Model [Borja de Mozota 2003]

| Brand Management | Level of Decision | Brand decision | Design process | Design tools |
|------------------|-------------------|---|----------------|--|
| Brand definition | Strategic | Problems to solve with brand Brand/Positioning | Intention | Philosophy of the brand Mission Vision |
| | | Expression | Narration | Idea History Experience Character |
| Brand Identity | Tactical | Brand Concept Values Brand Architecture | Concept | -Aesthetic universe of the brand -Basic and permanent aesthetic principles -Visualization of brands architecture |
| Brand Image | Operational | Formalization | Creation | Form Specifications in three dimensions: emotional, cognitive, relational |
| Brand equity | Strategic | Brand Repositioning | Intention | Audit mission and actualization of aesthetic codes |

This model is organized as a matrix (Table 2).

Vertically, we associate the brand concepts with the tools of the creative process, from the marketer and from the designer viewpoints. And, horizontally we differentiate them at each of three levels of decision-making in brand management: strategic, tactical, and operational. Which corresponds to brand management: definition, identity, image ,equity.

This model is a representation of the professional reality between brand and design professionals both within in-house design departments or with outside design consultancies.

How the model works as the brand building process

- innovation or brand values: opportunity identification for sustained brand leadership and growth; inspire the future consumer and market place
- strategy or brand meaning: unique and meaningful brand promise; understand consumer shopper, market and brand
- design or brand expression: express the brand strategy through experiential brand assets;; create identity interact (establish individual equity assets ,integrate through holistic execution across franchise ,create guidelines for allegiant implementation)

At each decision level of brand management, objectives and tools of design will change:

- Strategic brand design: create the brand and develop brand capital

The automotive industry is certainly the one that has best formalized its organization of design management of the brand in the long term, by innovating organizationally and creating "Brand Character Center"

*"Every part of the vehicle reflects the design philosophy or "visual brand strategy"
[Asensio et al 2005].*

- Tactical-brand design: designing brand identity

Building brand equity consists of managing the consistency between these materials, and retaining the customer experience.

Example: Apple rank first in brand identity and good design.

- Operational brand design: designing brand image

Managing the brand over time is to understand that the brand only exists through its acts, and therefore in particular by actions both through design mix and marketing mix: communication, signage, products, promotion, exhibition stands, brochures, and websites...

The brand image is created by the memorized accumulation of these acts.

Finally, this brand aesthetics model is a continuing process that never ends.

Designing the brand image varies according to the phases of the lifecycle of the brand. The brand objective aims to:

- awareness-building: to reveal and protect the fundamentals, to bring out the brand invariants, its semiotic code, its formal code, and its architectural code.

- creating an image: to enliven the brand by integrating the fashion codes of the time and in different media relations.
- building brand equity: to manage the coherence between all the brand applications and to improve customer faithfulness and customer experience

7. CONCLUSION

Designing a brand is far from a false technical or operational reality, in its limited knowledge of drawing. Behind a drawing or logo or a graphic signature that customizes a brand, there was from the beginning a plan, an idea. Designers' skills participate in strategic marketing decisions aiming at societal and cultural innovation.

“In business category, smart brands have watched their market be overtaken by meaningful experiences that no one ever thought would work: Dyson / Hoover, Microsoft / Linux ...

We have progressed from design being about making things simple and easy to design being about making people care. If you want to create tremendous value in today's market place you should consider designing a meaningful brand experience “ [Norton 2010]

The “Brand Aesthetics” model presented here is exploratory and educational. Coming from design and marketing professional practices, it must be validated by further research. Another avenue for research will be to analyze how to insert this model in brand evaluation models.

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