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## Brand: approaches and contextualization of the concept

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### Abstract

This communication intends to present a view and context of the brand concept, sustained in doctorate in Design developed by the author.

Every year, and in an ever more mediatic way, new brands have been designed (or redesigned), and there is no area of activity that escape this phenomenon, by necessity, fascination, fashion or any other reason, institutions - in which we may include countries and regions - corporations, companies or even individuals, these exercises are targeted ever more multidisciplinary.

Until the eighties marketing and advertising disciplines were, almost exclusively, holders, relegating to a plan of almost insignificance towards all other areas involved; from the nineties to the present day these disciplines and specialties ranging from Public Relations or Communication Design at the Branding, have been gaining visibility through areas such as the naming or typography, among others, offering them all the greatest richness and robustness in order to transform it, in most cases, into the strongest asset owned by companies.

Presented in this paper are questions about the shape as well as the product and its communication. Also approached, is the verbal construction of the brand and the importance and influence that the designer can have in its construction, giving emphasizing important factors to consider in its development.

Although the emphasis is placed on the area of design, it is intended to offer a contribution to the conceptual understanding of the heterogeneity as well as clarifying the concept across all areas associated with it.

KEYWORDS: brand, design, holistic view, transdisciplinary, conceptual

### Introduction: an approach to the concept of brand

When we look at the moon at night, observe the trace left by an airplane or the scratches that the cat made on the couch at home, we tend to believe that the lunar craters, the line in the sky or tears in the fabric, are marks, as ephemeral they may be. The same can thought about the Lascaux paintings or the promises of eternal love written on a tree by a teenager in love. However, only the latter two examples, demonstrated by the intention to communicate something - engraving - to someone, may be regarded as true marks. The others, although they visually mark the space or object and can be read and interpreted, are not sustained by an intention or an argument: they simply exist.

It seems therefore consensual, who sees the mark from the point of view of its form, it is "the signal that is made by the act of marking, the marking of a matrix or a trace on surface" (Costa, 2004, p. 21), centering on the intent of the author (and the ability of the reader to interpret the signal) and the difference between brand and a not brand. In this sense the question raised in 1710 by George Berkeley "If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?" (Wikipedia, if a tree falls in a forest, 2012). If we transpose this enigma for brands, it is shown that these depend on its recognition as such, or they risk never acquiring such a status, remaining in a silent limbo forever.

However, this concept of mark left by Costa is too wide raging making it therefore necessary to define the field to the concept of trademark or registered mark (ie, with the intent to identify and communicate an institution, activity, product or service). It is also an artificial construction - is understood as being unnatural - a reputation among target audiences and social communities with the intent of stimulating them and bringing out feelings of belonging.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, with the emergence the first trademarks conceptually similar to the current brands, which has been witnessing an increasing prevalence and role of brands in relation to goods or services that they project. Products or services have long ceased to be sold on its own, and are now under the control of the brands that sustain and certify them. As stated by Juan Tejada, "commerce is not done much around products but more around brands" (2006, p.193). As an example we have brands like Seat and Skoda that had a poor reputation in the segments in which they competed when they were independent brands, became, after integration in the Volkswagen group, in major assets, repositioning itself by enhancing its international reputation. Thus, these brands have established themselves in the markets, boosting sales of associated products, that are not just cars, but also the status associated with them and that those who buy them believe that are going to transmit.

As Frutiger says, brands are "signatures of any type of goods" (1981, p.254) that are used by those who hold them to identify, differentiate and gain notoriety. More than a logo, visual identity or an object (Neumeier, 2008, p.1-2), brand is something (product, service or institution) with which people connect through a strong sense of identity and belonging, represented by a name, because "that has no name there" (Costa, 2008 05 08), and a sign, that is, a signal capable of representing something other than itself. Joan Costa calls it "a sensible sign, both verbal and visual sign" (2004, p.28). The designer must take a leading role in building this brand and synthesized all the values, feelings, relationships and identity in a drawing, which will play a key role towards success.



### **Factors of the brand: from design to naming**

#### Drawing and components

It is clear, from what has been previously stated, the drawing of a brand is, along with its name, usually one of the first and most important contacts we made with it. As the popular saying goes “you never get a second chance to make a good first impression” which, in a well-designed brand is half way towards creating a relationship of empathy and often loyalty with the consumer. If the consumer is positively impressed, he will identify the brand when confronted with it or other competitors. As Mollerup says “we have blind faith in everything we see” (1987, p.10), from which one can infer that, whether or not consistent with the image they transmit, the brand influence and constrain the behavior those who interact with them. Design allows companies to take advantage of this by inducing the consumer behaviors that allow a positive qualitative assessment, thanks to the information it transmits and the image it communicates.

But this is not exclusive for visual or auditory signs. As expressed by Mollerup, “the image of a company is not only determined by its visual aspect. Just as a tree is known by its fruits, a company is recognized for his actions, especially those which are visible” (1987, p.10)

The negative image that a company can carry, if undeserved, might be the result of a poorly planned communication strategy. In this case, the design should be in charge of the redesign of the visual elements of the company to correct them and thus to ensure greater effectiveness of visual communication. The opposite case, where a false image (deceptively perfect), is equally unsustainable, and there should be intervention in product design so that, at least, it reflects what visual communication company says it is.

#### The construction of the visual identity

Per Mollerup, referring to the evolution of brands says that “as societies tend to be more complicated, the brand seems to become more simple” (1997, p.198).

However, contrary to what one would expect, this trend is not based on matters of mere taste but in need of a quick and easy identification. Thus the importance of understanding how to build the visual universe of a brand that is founded from two major areas: image and identity, subdivided into branding and corporate identity.

Regarding to the image, it plays a key role because of the importance that the human being gives the visual sense, which is emphasized by Matthew Healey stating that “although we think and communicate verbally, we are guided in our environment, particularly by the vision” (2009, p.96). Per Mollerup goes deeper in this notion emphasizing the connections that the thought constructs to allow associations, saying that “what we see with our eyes, we draw broad conclusions and with the power of thought, we see things that do not exist but they were inspired by things that we saw” (1987, p.10). From what

humans see, it is possible to take multiple associations, where the experience with the brand does not escape this cognitive phenomenon: feelings of safety, comfort, well-being, confidence, can generate a belief in the promises that they make. As Francisco Providência so well illustrates in the Management Design Manual, “when we have a malfunction leaving a Fiat dealership, we think that is a consequence of its low cost but if it happened with a Mercedes, we will ask about what we could have done wrong...” (2008, p.40).

The written signs are required to enhance the visual form of brand image, contributing to a more efficient and effective communication, although the image of a brand is not only determined by what it communicates and promises: it will be also what makes effectively to fulfill the promise it announces.

#### Visual identity – the anatomy of the brand

When examined superficially, a brand can appear no more than the addition of a few elements: a little bit of color, one or two typefaces and sometimes a strong slogan, everything associated with a logotype or symbol. However, when examined in depth, you realize that it is a complex signal that goes far beyond its simple visual expression. There is not only a symbol and a name, despite it being that, and not all the symbols and/or names are trademarks. Jon Miller and David Muir make this clear with the example they present – “Calvin Klein is clearly the name of a brand, but what about Josef Stalin? Surely many people have heard of Stalin - but it would difficultly result as a brand name for perfumes or underwear” (2009, p.23). As such Healey adds, “A logo is not a brand, a name is not a brand, nor it is a product design, packaging design, visual identity, an advertising music or a shopping experience” (2009, p. 70). Luis Sucupira complemented these two perspectives stating, “a brand is actually a sign of visual appeal and psychological attributes” (2007, 01 11).

Hence the needs to trace anatomy, ie, define the form and structure of the constituent elements of the brand, to better understand them. As a matter of organizing and understanding the brand can be studied taking into account two large blocks that support it:

- ***The form (either visual or not). This is the signature of the mark, ie that which is approved by the consumer as that identifies the brand. Includes issues such as name, the brand's graphic design, typography, color, graphic style, all issues related to sense of sight, and can be extended to factors related to other senses.***

- ***The product and the conformation of their communication. This includes the issues and areas of expertise like Product Design, Packaging, Advertising, Public Relations, Marketing and interpersonal communication in customer support.***



### The shape

Name Even before existence, a brand needs a name. It will go through the brand that people will recognize it, says Costa, “the brands must move among and between people. How can something circulate without a name? What cannot be named cannot exist. The brand is, itself an exchange value and interchangeable” (2004, p.19). Hence the name is so important and it is upon this that the brand name will create its reputation.

As already noted, a brand is a symbol composed of a visual (non-verbal) and a verbal component. If the visual component is easily given the importance it really has, the verbal component is sometimes underestimated or regarded as a minor issue. However, when a brand is created, long before an image, drawing, icon or logotype is associated to a name. Under normal conditions, no one asks a designer (or another specialist from the area) to create a name for their brand from a pre-set design. However the opposite – that reveals the swiftness with which the naming is sometimes tackled – is a reality that the designer is faced with it frequently.

The name even before being written sounded in the minds of those who need it. The first unnamed brand is yet to be created. And this is for a simple reason: no matter how much the design will serve to strengthen the presence and brand recognition among consumers when someone wants a brand, he asks for it by his name. As Joan Costa certifies, “what you can not name, does not exist” (2004, p.19). Further, the name is the brand element that most reputed, and the only element that is not dispensable.

When creating a brand, it is essential that the definition of the name is one of the first steps being taken, not being seen as little more than a mere step of the strategic plan. This will be the sonorous form of the brand and should transmit, in line with the image, its values principles and positioning.

Graphic brand is the element that will spearhead a visual brand identity, which assumes to “ensure the fast identification of ownership and the company’s products” (Mollerup, 1987, p.36). This represents the brand and, over time, will become synonymous of the company/product that uses it.

The graphical representation of the brand can take various denominations, as we shall see that can be more or less correct. From the real term logotype to the common sense logotype; symbol, logo or logomarca (a Brazilian neologism that join logo and mark), everything serves, as a name for this graphic piece, essential for their effective memorization.

The most common term to refer to this graphic element is logotype, though, often, it doesn’t effectively deal with a logotype. According to the Houaiss Dictionary (2009), the word has its etymological origin at the junction of the Greek word logos (language, word) and type (lead cha-

racter, letter, to be reproduced by printing). Obviously, there are brands whose graphical representation is a real logotype, such as MoveOn or TAP (Portuguese brands of footwear and aviation, respectively), but there are others in which the absence of letters prevents the use of this term. Cases such as Nike or Shell, which abandoned the use of the name written and appealed to represent them, just their visual symbol in the form of pictograms.

There are also the terms imagotype and logo, although any one of them are inaccurate or even wrong.

The last one — logo —, although it does not appear in any dictionary reference to the meaning given to it by many designers, seems to be a general term to call found the graphics of the brand, as Healey explains, stating that “one logo can take any form. Some logos are constituted only by one word. Others are a symbol without words. Many involve a combination of both. Many logos have multiple variants of shape or color” (2009, p.90).

Typography The choice of one or more types that will monitor the graphic representation of the brand as well as the applications associated does always influence how the brand is assimilated. As Healey proclaims, “type is the clothes that involves the words, giving them character, emphasis and a subtle but distinct personality that the reader often feels unconsciously” (2009, p.96).

However, it is necessary to distinguish the function that typography has in graphic representation of the brand from the one that will serve as background material for use in communication. In fact, through typography one can enhance the distinctiveness of the visual identity that does not mean surrender of the function that it should play, that is, to communicate the message, distinguishing, if necessary, the types used in the logo those used, for example, in the body of text of a letter, in order to enhance the message without giving rise to distraction. Despite the strength and recognition of the public concerning the types used in the logos of Coca-Cola and Greenpeace, it’s difficult to conceive a text with two or three pages clear and readable using the same types.

Color In some brands, color is at least as important as the drawing itself. As an example, brands such as Orange, Yellow Pages or even Greenpeace adopted the color name. There is also the case of colors that were so closely linked to brands that are now identified as color of the company. This is the case of green, associated to Benetton, or red to Ferrari. These are just two of the most prominent examples.

In choosing color, you should also regard to technical concerns of its reproduction: some colors are not capable of being reproduced in four-color or display color, such as silver or golden color, and may his conversion to CMYK and RGB create ambiguities that the direct conversion does not create.



**Graphic style** The use of pictures, illustrations and other graphic motifs color bars, fillets, dash, etc., is used nowadays not only in the advertising media but on all means of communication that a brand has and needs. If the visual elements are well selected and applied in various media, it can have a very positive impact on the client, which will be impressed. A Portuguese proverb says “by the breeze will see who is the coach”, meaning that the customer is influenced by the surrounding environment which is given to the product, creating expectations about the experience it may provide.

The graphic style, not just due to media such as billboards, mupis, or newspapers but also to campaigns for television and web pages, is using more and more, and so obviously, a part of photography. According to Healey, the “realistic images are the most powerful element used in brand communication – stronger perhaps than the combination of name, logo, colors and font” (2009, p.98). All of this is because “when we talk about creating a brand identity, we talk about image creation” (ibid).

Is noteworthy that the content and the graphic style should never left to reflect the brand (much as the realism of the image can be manipulated or not): a large and luxurious car should not look short and stocky just like a small utility should not look a limousine.

**Connected factors to other senses than the vision** Besides the name, the graphic representation, typography, color and graphic style, which represent the basic elements of the brand, there are others that goes beyond its design, associating it with a sound, smell, taste or touch A radio station, for example, may have a signature that will be not only a draw: a certain jingle and his variations, can identify so efficiently the radio station we tuned in the car as a building of ten floors covered with his brand on it .

But the other senses should not be neglected, as Martin Lindstrom on Brand Sense says “consumers have a strongly reaction to the brands that can involve all the senses” (apud Healey, 2009, p.104). Healey said even if “studies show something that bakers and pastry chefs have always known: a strong and pleasant smell attracts people and encourages them to buy” (2009, p.104). This applies to all senses capable of being stimulated.

The stimulus may also be varied between almost imperceptible, as often happens in the field of flavors, and the most relevant experience for the consumer, depending on a variety of factors such as products, brands, public culture, among others. Certainly, when properly designed, beyond the valuation, the multisensorial experience creates a strong brand loyalty in the user.

#### Product and its communication

**Product design** If the first block focuses on the questions of the shape, the second is set in the brand proposal. It begins with the reason of its existence: what she has to offer?

Support the growth of a strong brand in a policy-based product design, ie a balance between aesthetic and functional component of the objects, has been an upward trend since “the designer of modernist furniture and vehicles” (Healey, 2009, p. 84). Brands like Braun, Ikea, Bang & Olufsen, Apple or Alfa Romeo, although working for different audiences and segments, are examples. Their products are inseparable from the high level of incorporation of design throughout the development process, with results in terms of reputation and added value.

However, to make that possible, the brands had to understand what the customer could expect from them, their cultural patterns, consumption habits, etc., in order to reduce the risk of no return investment which, in some of cases, could lead to serious financial problems to the his owners. As an example we present two cases from Apple: Newton and the iPad. While the market, despite his innovative nature, rejected the first – only near 200000 pieces selling in five years –, the second, launched in 2010, sold in just 80 days 3 million units. Despite the innovation patent on both devices, the numbers seem to prove that, rather than the existence of a need, who draws the line that separates success from failure is the opening of the consumers to buy a new gadget, arising from the creation of expectation that managed to impose their strong brand. This and that public confidence deposit in products and in the identity of the brand.

**Package** The package assumes importance that is expressed by Heatley when he says “the packaging design is often the real reason for the existence of a brand” (2009, p.106). The multi-function that it plays, are shortcuts on the way to success: first and foremost, is a container that should protect and maintain the product, just as it was conceived until it reaches the consumer, often including in himself instructions for use and information security. It should serve as a communication interface in order to, first, communicate the brand identity and, secondly, to attract the attention of the consumer retail space, allows the positioning of the product within a particular category or price and may even serve for reuse purposes other than the original, allowing the extension of the contact with the brand.

The role of the designer is, for all this, of capital importance in the development of package and, as Mollerup emphasizes “be careful to respond to the prevailing conventions of a particular market, (...) make the packaging to visual identity of the rest of the enterprise and be part of the family of products (...) and distinguish the product both to similar products from other companies as against the other products in the same company” (1987, p.88).

**Advertising, Public relations and Marketing** These three areas expertise related to the brand are grouped together because, although they share complementary visions, orient themselves for the same purpose: to promote the product, service, company or brand.





Advertising, communication strategy of persuasiveness has the purpose to promote a commercial product or company accelerating the economic production-consumption circuit. Appears in various media (classic and new) and in various media ranging from printed material – such as magazines and newspapers, billboards, direct mail or even in the case of itinerant advertising, t-shirts, hats or buttons with the brand printed on it – the audiovisual, radio, television, cinema and Internet. According to Costa & Moles “confirmed its omnipresence as a symbol of the culture of industrial societies” (1999, p.13). Their contribution to the brand identity is also crucial, despite the ephemeral nature of which it contains.

Healey says “If advertising is the visible face of a brand, then the craft known throughout the world as Public Relations is the invisible” (2009, p.120). So the PR function is to “maintain mutual understanding between a public or private institution and groups of people that are, directly or indirectly connected” (Wikipedia, Public Relations, 2012). The strategy that follow is very different from that followed by advertising, not promoting the brand in a visible manner, preferring to agitate public opinion in order to make way for advertising messages that will be launching. Al Ries goes further by stating, “advertising does not build brands, PR do it. Advertising is just to keep brands that have already been created by the RP” (Ries, 2003, p.19). An example is the Apple and the launch of new products (some of them truthful new brands like the family of “i” – iMac, iTunes, iPod, iPhone or iPad).

Marketing is, according to the Houaiss Dictionary, a “business strategy for optimizing profits through the adjustment of production and supply of goods or services to the needs and preferences of consumers” (2009), participating in the process from conception to the after purchase of a product. Their market knowledge is the great asset that we offer to businesses, serving up the predictability of behavior of that market to strategize. Francisco Providência says that “serves the marketing organizations producing thought of the needs and ambitions of the market, segmenting it into different structures of interest and ability to purchase (...) (taking) the party for the all, reducing the whole society to consumers” (Providência, 2008, p.114). Due to a view sometimes a bit reductionist, tends to see only the opportunity as “sales opportunities” (ibid), when it should first have a closer view of the design, which sees them as “opportunities for change” (ibid).

Customer service For the final leave one of the main company-customer interfaces. This can range from simple one-stop contact until the after-sales service or the telephone help lines, and the importance of such services increases as consumers become more demanding, often assuming a role as important or more to the success of the Advertising and PR.

If until some fifteen or twenty years ago there were few links between the company and the client, hoping that nothing went wrong with the product or service, the con-

sumer now has a lot to choose whether the relationship with the brand is not the expectable. Healey says “failure to provide satisfactory support to the client (...) is the main reason for losing customers to the brands that cost them much to gain” (2009, p.126). For satisfactory support means more than providing answers to routine problems, the need to make an effort for the customer to be really satisfied. Healey explains it well in stating that “provide a level of customer service that exceeds expectations is the best way to create buzz and make people to speak of a brand” (ibid, p.129), leading them believed and became loyal, to them.

If people believe and became faithful will, as in any cult, engage with the brand, so enthusiastic about it, and because of this, the enthusiasm replicate, infecting as if it were a virus, quickly, unstoppable and affecting a large number of individuals. If, however, they can “irritate a devotee, a terrorist-brand will get in his hands” (Atkin, 2008, p.166). Create strong links as happens between people, involves constantly feed the relationship in order to keep it alive and well. If not, it is quite possible that the discouragement leads to distrust and, worse, to an impetuous end, with broad repercussions on the reputation of the most exposed value: the brand.

### **Conclusion**

If it appears that the big brands are already mapped out, there are small companies or companies with some expression but limited to their countries or regions, eager to grow and gain international status.

The study developed by the author in his PhD was based on the analysis at four strong in the Portuguese market but with low expression on an international level, in order to understand how to enhance the communicative power of each of them. Among the many conclusions reached, it was highlighted that allowed us to observe that the strength of the brand could be maximized for internationalization, based on strong character identity that each of them had, whether it would join an effort to improve and adapt their communication with the new markets. Three of them, TAP, GALP and Vista Alegre are already doing that, while the fourth, Delta Cafés, is preparing to extend its offer to the market after it has been implemented in Spanish. The four Case Study have in common a reflection on the importance of image as a vehicle for transmission of their DNA, concluding that this is strengthened as it is given greater importance to its design, correcting what is less well and enforced what is correct.

Any brand originating in developing countries know that, whatever their size, the possibility of expanding markets is increasing, and should develop an integrated program that will include not only communication but also the product and the institution. The temptation is huge to develop an image similar to the competition in markets in which it proposes to impose, abdicating of their own identity, can be great, but will not create differentiation neither authenticity.



It appears therefore the relevance of this study: the thought of design or redesign a mark the author suggests that it take into consideration the factors set out as a means to ascend to a higher (and ideally high) degree of notoriety.

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