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Brand Design or Design Brand?

The Role of Strategic Design in the Corporate Identity

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«The identity is made of all those signals which, consciously or unconsciously, are emitted by the transmitter, while the reconstruction of those signals is the image that the receiver has of it.

[...] The identity is the a narration of real concurrencies, the image is its interpretation.»

(F.Carmagnola, M.Ferraresi, *Merci di culto*, Castelvevchi,1999)

1_IDENTITY (the past)

The enterprise defines its identity through the use of a series of nouns and adjectives, characteristics which allow us to distinguish it from its competitors. The brand comes from the German word “marka”, and it means “that which distinguishes, separates, which marks the boundaries.”

However it is right to define this thematic more precisely.

Corporate Identity: identity = essence of the company, all which it is and it does.

Corporate image: image = what others think of the company.

Many times companies have defined their identity in opposition to their direct competitor. For example, Apple has created its image by placing itself as an alternative to IBM, “the other way of conceiving informatics” (Jean Marie Floch, 1995).

Therefore, all the company is, is part of its identity: from the people who work there, to its buildings, but also its history, its strategies of distribution, sale, its products, its internal and external communication, etc.

The areas of activity in which the company can operate in order to define its identity coexist but often some can be more predominant.

To aim on the product/ service (what is done and sold). In a product-oriented company, for example, the product is the most significant element for the definition of the identity mix.

Rarely, thinking of Sony one remembers the brand, the logo or shops. This company has given birth to a strong identity thanks to the emission on the market of a range of successful and innovative products (the walkman for example) which have become its distinctive element.



To aim on the environment (selling points). Some companies focus their attention on the environment of the selling point. The store and its peculiar characteristics, give birth to the identity of the company. For example in the Italian context the most none case has been the Fiorucci stores.

To aim on the information (how it promotes or commercializes). Many companies put much effort and investments in communication, overlapping what is communicated to the company's identity.

For example Coca-Cola has given great importance to the communication. The consumers have therefore associated the values expressed in the communication, such as fun and youth, with the values of the company itself.

02_IDENTITY (the present)

«In the past the competitive advantage was focused mainly on “Knowledge to do things better”, on the offer of better products and services; today the “Knowledge of why things are done” is even more important than the “Knowledge to do things better”.

Therefore, next to the so called “Know-how”, a company also has a “Know-why”.

(Giulio Ceppi, 1998)

In the past 30 years the way in which a company is managed and developed has deeply changed, pushed by the greater changes of the society at the beginning of the new millennium. Behaviors, motivations, tastes and values of the consumers have profoundly changed leading to the crisis of entire production sectors.

Once all basic needs have been satisfied, the consumer is pushed towards the consumption of products with a high evocative value, therefore, sense tanks which give birth to visions, imaginary worlds and infinite interpretive levels.

The typology and quality of the relationship developed between the consumer and the company becomes fundamental and remains constant and strong if the values are shared by both sides. Therefore, in order to strengthen its identity, a company must not only concentrate on the evolution of its products, but also on the value chain which determines the development of each artifact, both physical and virtual, both a service and a communication.

Among the many values which emerge from this society, three macro-areas can be detected: the emotional dimension, the ethical responsibility and the performance dimension.

Emotional dimension

The desire to dive in a dense world, to participate in a play, to live an experience.

This dimension is linked to two main values: poli-sensorial and experience.

Ethical responsibility

The level of respect the brand has due to the social and environment responsibility.



Performance dimension

Linked to the capability to respond to the needs of the consumers, through the individual and immediate offer. Therefore the quality of the personalization and flexibility – innovative capability.

2.1 Case histories

NIKE

To create a Myth-brand

“Giving back to the community isn’t part of what we do-it’s part of who we are”

The value of flexibility and of innovative capability is predominant, the company communicates this not only through highly innovative products coherent to the youth tendencies, but also through a great attention to new media, in particular internet where it is present in many websites.

Through the development of image stores, the company has been capable to also satisfy the emotional needs of the consumers, giving birth to entertainment places where one does not only go to purchase products.

Peculiarities

The “swoosh” has officially entered the global visual vocabulary.

Niketown, one of the most important examples of “relationship building” places which the company uses to communicate and spread out its vision to the world.

Products which link street and fashion worlds to innovative material and technology research.

The company decides to use sport champions as testimonials. In this way, the company defines its identity as a leader in the market of sportswear.

Nike also uses many satellite sites for its connection to the net, moving from the on-line store to videogames, from promoting company information to news of sport champions.

APPLE

Continuously changing identity

“only those who are mad enough to believe to be able to change the world, will really achieve to change it”.

More than a company, a constant emotion. Capable for years to feed a spasmodic hunger for the entrance of a new segmented cult product in the market, giving birth to belonging communities.

Forerunners of good design inside the gray world of informatics, capable of changing its image throughout the esthetic change of its products which are always linked to fashion. Starting from an apple made of inverted rainbow colors (characteristic of creative excellence) which was in opposition to IBM’s “code bar”, up to the black or the highlighted apple, maniacally coordinated and positioned on all packaging and technological supports produced.

Peculiarities

An identity which is capable to change together with the innovative design of new products.



Strong predisposition to “viral marketing”, its campaigns are mainly positioned inside the information exchanges between final users instead of being a real publicity campaign. Creation of communities of fanatics both of hardware and software products.

Capable to make the “Ipod” become a standard for all mp3 players.

Monopoly of its own market segment thanks to its development platform.

UNITED COLORS OF BENETTON

Transgression through innovation

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”

“[...] The product, belongs to the image now.”

“Benetton reproduces itself through all the colors of the world”

Benetton has created its image through strongly provocative publicity campaigns, with social themes and in some cases with environmental friendly characteristics, up to the point of making the companies image become itself a product of the company and giving birth to a newspaper: Colors. In order to legitimate the actions inside areas which are usually not strictly part of the company’s competences, the company has organized and supported many initiatives, moving from a general logic of “suing” to an “action logic”. The company also appears to be innovative thanks to “Fabbrica”, experimental laboratory which is involved in different areas.

Peculiarities

Strongly provocative publicity campaigns.

Absence of the product and enlargement of the company legitimacy to problematic socio-cultural areas. The Corporate image has become itself one of the Benetton products.

Humanitarian initiatives, the company moves from a “suing” logic to an “action universe, legitimating its position thanks to external statement which act as a guarantee (for ex. Caritas, Croce Rossa).

Benetton Store, selling points which are present all over the world are characterized by an open and luminous environment.

Fabrica, creativity has the power. Experimental laboratory for a better society. It invests creativity non profit with the aim to produce new ideas in the field of design, graphics, music, fashion, etc.

Colors magazine, an on-line and paper newspaper. “Illustrated anthropology”, “virtual catalogue of the world products”, “a newspaper which talks about the rest of the world”.

Playlife, the sport world of Benetton.

Playlife-TV, benetton’s television program on sport in all its dimensions (from great events, to unknown disciplines in the emerging countries).

MUJI

Branded minimalism

“In future American-style retails , those supermarkets and discount stores seen in US suburbs, might win out. But the trend could go in the other direction, toward European-style speciality store, I suppose. The beauty of speciality store is that it can target a particular consumer lifestyle.”



Particularly careful to the emotional dimension especially inside the selling points, curious and stimulating environments to be explored. The ethic dimension is particularly focused on the environmentally friendly aspects, key point of the philosophy which leads the company. This key point of the corporate identity has given birth to precise and clear values which can be seen throughout all means of expression of the company (no-brand, simplicity, natural materials, etc.).

Peculiarities

Selling points to be explored, in which products which belong to different production sectors coexist, giving birth to a creative and stimulating environment.

Specialized store, not because it offers specialized products, but because it reflects a particular style of life.

Products which apparently belong to different productive sectors are all characterized by simplicity, natural materials and moderate prices.

DIESEL

For successful living

“Diesel is also a state of mind: it means being open to new things, listening to one’s intuition and being honest with oneself. We would like to offer our consumers a total look which reflects this attitude.”

It is a company which has always invested a great amount of energy to be up-to-date, innovative and trendy. It makes individuality become a fundamental value, with a strong belief in the fact that every single individual must create their own personal look. Forerunning not only in fashion, but also in communication: through the creation of a “tailor-made” testimonial, which is capable of representing the company’s values and that also stimulates interest, Joanna. The image stores are also interesting, as the ideal means for representing the Diesel environment.

Peculiarities

Image-stores and flagship stores are the ideal means through which the company can represent the Diesel environment, the perfect framework for the entire collection.

Creation of testimonials / Avatars capable to communicate the company’s mood directly. Joanna, tailormade testimonial, around which the company has developed a story.

Original collections dedicated to all those who decide to want to express their individuality through what they wear.

Pelican hotel, extravagant and without sense; 25 rooms designed and decorated in order to make their customers feel as if they were inside a surreal set.

3_IDENTITY (The Future)

«The passage from designing a product to designing the relationship between the brand and the consumer, a relationship which goes beyond the short term direct necessity of selling a product, which seeks for fidelity, through the proposition of values and styles of life more than products or solutions.»

(Domus Academy Research Center: A.Branzi, E.Genovese, M.Susani, M.Trimarchi, R.Tagliabue, New Industrial Design)



«The designer, by becoming a director, should be capable of managing the perception of the visibility of a company, not only involved in resolving punctual changes, but also «not allowing the loss of all the actions and enabling them to be added to one another, such as a portrait which slowly gains more details: each detail determines the final result, even errors».

(Giovanni Anceschi, discussion with Vanni Pasca in Impresainvisibile, Bridge)

In this new multi-sensorial and multi-modal era, the elasticity of a project of a Corporate Identity and its potential declinations, hence its capacity to always respond to the requirements and needs of the changing market and to be able to use, in time, the developments of the media, are fundamental and positive aspects for the reinforcement and success of the project itself.

Therefore the designer must be capable to shape an institution or a company in time; the designer must achieve a orchestration capacity, believing in work not as something static, but as a director of events.

In my experience, the phenomenology of design of the end of the nineties is the maximum expression of the representation of such scenarios.

However, in time, the methodology of research and development of new products has become more pragmatic, leaving to experience design the duty to satisfy the latent needs of consumers who have become accustomed to all elaborate alternative systems.

3.1 From vision to experience

«In Mintzberg the image of a company which accepts the strategy as a prospective is the one that looks for the woods from above the trees», this could be the most impressive and exciting meaning one could give to the term strategy. Its capacity to detect unexplored spaces, to adventure experimenting and focusing on new visual maps, designing new knowledge tools.

These attitudes are the same which can be identified also in new design fields: such as Vision design which needs strategic methodologies, approaches and tools in order to manage visions, scenarios, evolved horizons; such as Experience design which focuses more on the client, behaviors and desires of emotional and memorable experiences».

(Francesco Zurlo, 1999)

In order to give a more specific definition, or in order to define an interval of existence and action of experience design, we must introduce elements of confrontation with other design fields.

Experience design is confronted with Vision design (and Visual design) in terms of company environments and contexts, therefore in terms of problematic areas of visibility, identity, production and corporate communication.

Vision design is a design activity which is based on the analysis, research, exploration and production of multidisciplinary teams, who elaborate and design not only product concepts but also future scenarios. The typology of communication used can be compared to an impressive communication, since it expresses impressive, charming and original themes, usually through films or multimedia products.



Experience design is a design orientation which interacts with a series of systematic factors which are difficult to manage and define. It is inserted and interacts inside the interior, perceptive, sensorial and emotional complexities of human beings.

It proposes a communication which is capable to create experience situations and environments through the building of relationship and interaction processes with the final users. This typology of communication does not occur through defined channels or tools, on the contrary, through the coordination and synergetic effects of different media.

Taking into consideration the communication themes, contents and tools of the analyzed orientations, it is possible to build a schematic representation through a hypothetical complexity axis: the Experience design, is the most wide design activity, which can embrace and contain all the other design activities.

In this prospective, it is possible to embrace a common concept in different design disciplines: Transitive Design.

Through time, crossing the visual limit, looking beyond things.

Since the beginning of the past century designers have always aimed to represent a possible future and innovative image. Today, this is no longer enough, the future has become the present. The present is considered a passage, a moment of transition. The actors change and the emotional sphere of design becomes more important. An emotional dialogue between the artifact and the consumer, which involves all senses, must be built.

The esthetics of today, in-between past and future, reveal one of the most complex, mature and evolved languages of this century. Exaggerated and radical aspects are no longer important, while expressive and more moderated, almost reflective, attributes achieve more importance. A sense of continuity, lost in the past, is now recovered. Transitive design is the representation of the end of an era but not yet the beginning of a new era. Research must be based on the attitude of looking at the "close" future with a visionary pragmatism.

It is not merely a remake of a product or of old lines, transitive is not considered a conservative operation, because recognizing the "old" in esthetic terms is counterbalanced by an innovative attitude in technological terms. Transitive design is very close to the Japanese designer Naoki Sakai's idea of "retro future".

3.2_From hard to soft qualities

Today, it is no longer possible to concentrate on single aspects of products or of communication, but on how the product will be perceived by the consumer. The consumer does not have a detailed knowledge of the product, but buys products on the base of a general perception. Therefore, for example, a detergent is not chosen because of its perfume but because of its efficiency in cleaning; a wine because of its taste and not its tag, etc.

The success of these "perceptive brands" shows that the final user will spend more in order to have the perception wanted. Therefore, the perceptive qualities which lie in signs and objects, the so called soft qualities, must be enhanced.

New dimensions are amplified; touch, smell, etc. Become the new potential attractors.

To invest on the texture, the communicative skin, means to move the technological resources towards a new and more open dimension.



3.3_Fuzzy thinking

New graphics, new lines of orientation, new technologies, new prospective, new scenarios and new imaginary worlds. All the above have determined the dissolution of the paradigm of being and has lead to the birth of the paradigm of becoming, enhancing the concept of moving form.

If “the limits of language are the limits of the world” as Wittgenstein (Philosopher, 1889 - 1951) said, thanks to the birth of new expressive and interpretative codes, today we can “see“ a world which has always been present but hidden.

Since the beginning of the 80’s the term Fuzzy indicates a typology of Logic (Fuzzy Logic) used with great success in the field of the artificial intelligence.

Fuzzy Graphic refers to the “linear discontinuity”, a guide to control the new design modalities in an inverted prospective, through the direction of the “blurred sign”, of the “mobile sign”. It is a infinitely complex, fast and perceived field.

Therefore the identity becomes changeable through different communication supports, vectorial on paper and visible bitmap on digital media. The aim is to freeze animation by absorbing all its kinetic energy.

In this way, the contemporary work of designers such as: John Maeda (Japan) or Peter Saville (UK), declares a strong influence of technological tools on the rigid rules of Brand Identity generation which have previously been disturbed by the cognitive revolutions of Unilever (brand), Metadesign (The Ocean Conservancy) or Narcisiva (brand of Valle d’Aosta, Italy), changing the visual density of elements defined as synthetic and codified, which are part of the entity perceived as a Logo.

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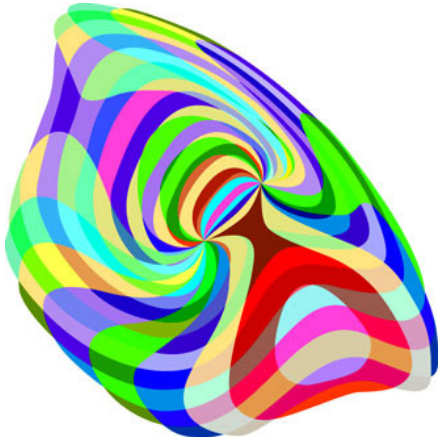
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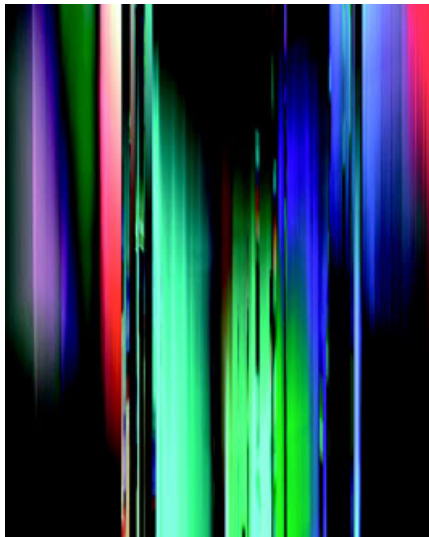
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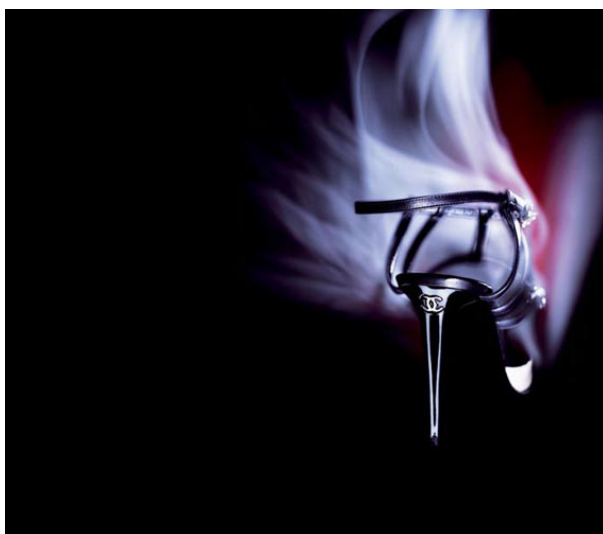
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