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Brand morphology

THE GENETIC CODING OF BRANDS

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Abstract

Oggi la maggiore minaccia strategica per la Cina è la sua immagine nazionale. Essendo una delle più potenti nazioni emergenti, la Cina è indubbiamente il punto di snodo di enormi interessi commerciali.

Sfide tattiche come la qualità di investimenti diretti che il paese richiama, la volontà di altre nazioni a fornire aiuto tecnologico e formativo e la diffusione delle imprese cinesi nel mercato internazionale richiedono una migliore definizione dell'immagine del paese. Anche il desiderio della classe governativa di mantenere la stabilità interna ha dei legami con come la nazione è vista e come vede se stessa.

La tesi è divisa principalmente in quattro parti. Partendo da una prima fase di ricerca, su come la Cina sia percepita come nazione sia all'interno che all'estero, la seconda parte mira a trovare una cornice nazionale capace di contenere il rapido tasso di cambiamento e la conseguente combinazione di una realtà complessa e di un incerto futuro.

Nata da un'intuizione, la Parte 3 analizza la categoria dei Blank Brand – brand su cui noi possiamo proiettare le nostre speranze, sogni e desideri nello stesso modo in cui proietteremmo un'immagine su uno schermo cinematografico – da un punto di vista morfologico. Per ottenere un'analisi morfologica il lavoro segue la procedura descritta in “Brand Morphology”, creando uno strumento che mira ad individuare un sistema di

classificazione che permetta una precisa definizione dell'informazione sul genoma del brand.

Sono stati scelti sei casi studio ed analizzati sulla base di parametri stabiliti.

Come sviluppo, la Parte 4 presenta la stesura di un set di linee guida per una strategia di costruzione di brand per un modello della categoria speciale dei Blank Brand.

La categoria dei Blank brand è quindi suggerita come una soluzione per la costruzione di nuovi brand cinesi.

Abstract

English text

China's greatest strategic threat today is its national image. Being one of the most powerful emerging countries, China is undoubtedly the crossing point of enormous commercial interests.

Tactical challenges such as the quality of foreign direct investment that the country attracts, the willingness of other nations to provide technological and educational aid, and the spread of Chinese businesses into international markets all claim a better definition of national image.

Even the leadership's desire to maintain internal stability has ties to how the country is seen and how she sees herself.

Mainly the thesis is divided into four parts.

Starting from the first part of research, on how China as country is perceived internally and by people abroad, Part 2 aims to find a national framework capable of containing China's rapid rate of change and the resulting combination of a complex reality and an uncertain future.

Born from an intuition, Part 3 investigates the category of the "Blank Brands" - brands onto which we can project our hopes and dreams and desires in the same way we would project an image onto a movie screen - from a morphologic point of view.

To obtain a morphological analysis the work follows the procedure described in "Brand Morphology", creating a

tool that aims to identify a classification system which allows a precise definition of the brand genome information.

Six case studies have been selected and analyzed on the basis of given parameters.

As breakthrough point, Part 4 focuses on a writing of a set of guidelines for a brand building strategy for a model of the special category of Blank Brand.

Blank Brand is suggested here as a solution for a new brand vision for China's consumer products.

Preface

The term “genetics” means the study of heredity and the variation of inherited characteristics. In biology with genetics we mean the study of the generation of living beings and the mode of transmission of hereditary characteristics.

In simple terms, the study of genetics is focused on understanding the mechanisms of heredity and variability of the individual.

In some aspects, the brand shares with genetics the necessity to understand the mechanisms of its own nature, in order to realize which features of each brand system are transmitted or transmittable and hence to build a general model, that is to say, a genetic model.

It is not a chance if more than a scholar has shown his interest in the genetics of a brand.

This work is an attempt to apply methods and procedures typical of the genome science to analyze real cases of brands.

The approach of a genetics model with the world of brand system gives as a result a new conceptual dimension.

The analysis of the genetic heritage of the brands is possible with the same accuracy with which is it processed genetics of individuals.

And if we cannot apply this concept to the brands in general, this can be applied in any case to the so called blank brands. And the entire research and study of “Brand morphology” is dedicated to this.

The investigation has required a detailed elaboration, but an effort was made in order to try to simplify and shorten wherever possible.

15/05/2010

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01 introduction

What branding is about

“Looked at from the outside, the brand seems to consist of a few elements - some colors, some typefaces, a strapline or slogan, all topped off with a logo or symbol, sometimes of an apparently allegorical nature but frequently consisting of a simple typeface. Sometimes a brand also embraces sound or music, and even smells. All of these ingredients seem to be mixed up and then plastered apparently more or less at random over everything that the organization owns or influences”¹.

In real life, nevertheless, it is a bit more complicated than that. Every organization of a substantial size carries out hundreds of thousands of transactions every day. It sells to distributors, dealers, and the final consumer. It outsources design and manufacture and other very important part of its business to companies who may be thousand of kilometers away, operating in different time zones with their own traditions and ambitions.

It hires or works with people who perhaps come from a multiplicity of social, economic, national, religious and ethnic backgrounds, and who therefore have varied cultural patterns. It markets its products through a chain of third-party dealers and distributors all over the world. It deals with local governments and central

1 Olins, Wally (2008), *The Brand Book*. UK. Thames & Hudson

governments. It also has relationship with stakeholders of different kinds, including investors, financial journalists and other commentators.

In all its transactions, the organization will in some way be presenting itself to some or all of the groups of people with whom it has relationships.

In other words, if it is to be seen as an entity, it must behave as an entity, and the corporate brand it projects to all its audiences must be consistent and coherent.

Branding embraces and is associated with marketing, design, internal and external communication and human resources. It becomes the channel through which the organization presents itself to itself and to its various external worlds. It influences every part of the organization and every audience of the organization all the time, everywhere.

Why brands are so important to customers

Once upon a time brands were simple household goods, soap, tea, washing powder, shoe polish, boring everyday products that were used up and replaced. The brand was a symbol of consistency. At a time of product adulteration, unreliable performance and variable pricing, it stood for standard quality, quantity and price. The brand's image projected and sustained the product. Nowadays all that has been stood on its head; brands have come up in the world. Today we mostly take a product's functional characteristics for granted and while brands are still all about image, it is no longer their own image, it is also our image.

Branding these days is largely about involvement and associations; the outward and visible demonstration of private and personal affiliation. Branding enables us to define ourselves in terms of a shorthand that is immediately comprehensible to the world around us.

Brands were created by marketing people inside large companies to seduce customers, to sell products by creating and projecting colorful but simple ideas clearly, again and again. The mechanism of branding was designed for and defined by modern communication techniques. But the branding idea has become successful way beyond the dreams of its creators, even the most ambitious of them.

Branding as moved so far beyond its commercial origins that its impact is virtually immeasurable in social and cultural terms.

It has spread into education, sport, fashion, travel, art, theatre, literature, the region, the nation and virtually anywhere else you can think of. Branding is increasingly employed by not-for-profit organizations and charities who compete in the emotional territory of people's heart and minds with commercial brands for the money in consumers' pockets. Brands and the idea of branding are the most significant gifts that commerce has ever made to popular culture.

A brand is a living memory

The spirit of a brand can be inferred through its products and its advertising. The content of a brand grows out of the cumulative memory of these acts, provided they are governed by a unifying idea or guidelines. There must be accumulation, not mere juxtaposition.

The importance of memory in the making of a brand explains why its image can vary between generations. This is the problem with dual brands such as Citroen: the brand image of those who discovered it through the 2CV is diametrically opposed to that of the discoverers of the DS or XM. The memory factor also partly explains why individual preferences endure: within a given generation, people continue, even 20 years later, to prefer the brands they liked between the ages of 7 and 18.

It is precisely because a brand is the memory of the products that it can act as a long-lasting and stable reference. Unlike advertising, in which the last message seen is often the only one that truly registers and is best recalled, the first action and message of a brand are the ones bound to leave the deepest impression, thereby structuring long-term perception. In this respect, brands create a cognitive filter: dissonant and atypical aspects are declared unrepresentative, thus discounted and forgotten. That is why failures in brand extensions on atypical products do not harm the brand in the end even though they do unsettle the investors' trust in the company.

Ridding itself of atypical, dissonant elements, a brand acts as a selective memory, hence endowing people's perceptions with an illusion of permanence and coherence. That is why brand is less elastic than its products.

A general survey

As we have seen before, a brand is a much broader and deeper experience than either the “logo and associated visual elements”.

This wider concept of brand includes intangibles aspects, the so called brand equity.

Brand equity refers to the marketing effects or outcomes that accrue to a product with its brand compared with those that would accrue if the same product did not have the brand name. And at the root of these marketing effects is consumers’ knowledge. In other words, consumers’ knowledge about a brand makes manufactures/advertisers respond differently or adopt appropriately adept measures for the marketing of the brand.¹ Brand perception and empathy are changeable and variable depending on the time and evolution and from individual to individual.

This is the reason it is not easy to study a brand in its wholeness.

Nowadays there are many ways to measure a brand. Some measurements approaches are at the firm level, some at the product level, and still others are at the consumer level.

Firm level: firm level approaches measures the brand

1 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brand_equity

as a financial asset. In short, a calculation is made regarding how much the brand is worth as an intangible asset. For example, if you were to take the value of the firm, as derived by its market capitalization, and then subtract tangible assets and “measurable” intangible assets, the residual would be the brand equity² .

One high profile firm level approach is by the consulting firm Interbrand. To do its calculation, Interbrand estimates brand value on the basis of projected profits discounted to a present value. The discount rate is a subjective rate determined by Interbrand and Wall Street equity specialists and reflects the risk profile, market leadership, stability and global reach of the brand.³

Product level: the classic product level measurement example is to compare the price of a no-name or private label product to an “equivalent” branded product. The difference in price, assuming all things equal, is due to the brand.⁴

Consumer level: this approach seeks to map the mind of the consumer to find out what associations with the brand the consumer has. This approach seeks to measure the awareness (recall and recognition) and brand image (the overall associations that the brand has). Free association tests and projective techniques are

2 Neumeier, Marty (2006) *The Brand Gap: How to Bridge the Distance Between Business Strategy and Design*, Berkeley, CA: New Riders Publishing

3 Chu, Singfat and hean Tat Keh (2006). “Brand Value Creation: Analysis of the Interbrand Business Week Brand Value Rankings.” *Marketing Letters*, 17, 323-331

4 Aaker, David A. (1996) “Measuring Brand Equity Across Products and Markets” *California Management Review*, 38 (Spring), 102-120

commonly used to uncover the tangible and intangible attributes, attitudes, and intentions about a brand.⁵ Brands with high levels of awareness and strong, favorable and unique associations are high equity brands. All of these calculations are, at best, approximations. A more complete understanding of the brand can occur if multiple measures are used.

In all these kinds of approaches, brand is never seen as a free standing whole but always referred to something else which constitutes its parameter of definition.

This research is an attempt to investigate the real nature of the brand itself, to unveil its core structure and composition, in a word, its fundamental original morphology, in order to establish what elements make of a brand a brand.

Genetics has proved to be a valid means of investigation for its capacity to point out the primitive, almost ancestral, constituents of a being. Our 'being' is brand.

5 Keller, Kevin Lane (1993). "Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity" *Journal of Marketing*, 57 (January) 1-22

Brand as genetic program

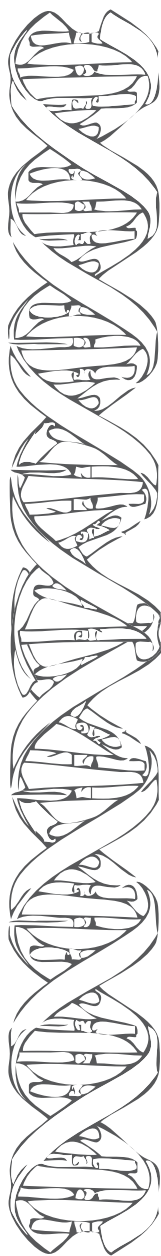
A brand is both the memory and the future of its products. The analogy with genetic memory is central to understand how brands function and should be managed. Indeed, the continuously developing brand memory contains the program for all future evolution, the characteristic of upcoming models and their common traits, as well as the family resemblances transcending their diverse personality.

By understanding a brand's program, we can not only trace its legitimate territory but also the area in which it will be able to grow beyond the products that initially gave birth to it.


Observed in comparison to a living entity, the genetic program can be discovered by analyzing the brand DNA, which is the essence of the brand, the seat where all the genetic instructions used in the development and functioning of the brand are summarised. The main role of the brand DNA is the storage of all the information. Brand DNA is a set of blueprints or a recipe or a code, it contains the instructions needed to construct or support the brand and its image.

It ensures stability of fundamental dispositions, attributing internal and external coherence to all the expressions and manifestations of the brand.


The brand DNA segments that carry this genetic information are known as genes.



On the basis of our interpretative model of genetics, we can pinpoint and identify in the brand:



Genotype features: genotypes indicate the combination of hereditary traits, the components a brand can transmit to its offspring which do not always correspond to its visible/external attributes.



Phenotypes features: phenotypes are secondary physical attributes determined both by its genetic patrimony and by environmental influence, consequently adaptable to the extent that needs for adaptability are context-driven.

Of the two, the former represents the predominant features of the brand, permanent and unchanging, reflecting its genetic structure.

The core of the brand, constantly fueled by its progenitor, lies however in the essence that determines its distinction. The feature or features that distinguish it from others, locus of brand value transferable over time, constitute its personality or, more specifically, its character, in terms of permanent traits.

The essence, presents an original and congenital, not easily modifiable structure.

Essence in effect, refers to how the brand functions in user scenarios and determines manifestations of personality, conferring continuity to market experience. (In addition: in its evolutionary process, the brand's uniqueness ends up representing a kind of objective limit, intrinsic and insurmountable save for the modification of its essential nature. However, during the

process, by means of its genotype attributes/features the progenitor can transfer its own meaning and values.)

On the contrary, phenotype attributes mainly have a temporary value; their essence is less stable and their structure precarious and transitory, socio-cultural dependent.

Examples of phenotype attributes are slogans or jingles accompanying the communications that characterize brands in the eyes/minds of the user, making them readily identifiable, engendering affection and contributing to brand recall; however, in the long-term they are subject to a semantic usury, and need restyling to update them to current taste and appeal. Phenotypes, therefore, make up the elements of brand which, in an evolutionary phase, can yield as a consequence of pre-determined demands.

To correspond or to support the capacity of adaptability of these recessive features, the dispositions of which in conceptual terms are “semi external”, as regards brand DNA, the ecotype attributes come into play. These aspects of the brand depend essentially on the different environments of development (like the adaptation of packaging on the basis of different intercultural interpretations or, the selection of testimonials or personality icons that contribute to the representation of the brand).

Treating the brand as an ecotype means to take into consideration attributes (essentially transitory) that emerge by virtue of their adaptation to the external environment and whose permanence remains functional while the brand relates to a specific community of consumers, ceasing their charge when interaction with the context ceases. Of the categories of attributes present, the ecotype features are those with less cognitive and affective persistence, in terms of “attitudes” in brands of practical utility for capturing/entertaining their clients.



03 methodology

A semiotic approach

Because of the brand system is extraordinarily diverse and changeable, brands cannot be taken into consideration and analyzed throughout the whole of their complexity. It is necessary to divide the material and the information.

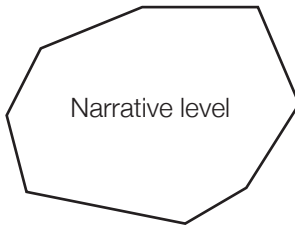
According to the model theorized by the semiologist Andrea Semprini, the construction of a brand identity starts with a project that defines the brand strategy and suggests an horizon of relevant meaning respecting the target expectations. The brand identity is then split into several levels of depth: a deep level consisting of a limited number of core values, the **significance level**, an intermediate level where the values are organized into stories and narratives (eg, seduction, threat, incentive, reward..), the **narrative level**; and a more superficial level in which values and narratives are enriched by the figures of the world (objects, shapes, colors, etc..), the **discourse level**.¹

Consequently, the closer we get to the core, the deeper the level is. The core contains the real essence of the brand, while getting closer to the surface, in contact with external agents, the level is less stable.

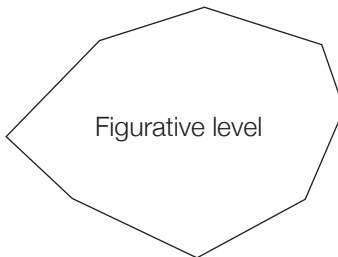
1 Semprini Andrea (2009) *La Marca Postmoderna, Potere e fragilità della marca nelle società contemporanee*, Franco Angeli, Milano, Italy



Deep



Intermediate



Superficial

Graph 1 Andrea Semprini model visualization.

Brand Morphology will follow Andrea Semprini's model in order to analyze and compare the different brands, throughout the significance level, the level of narrative and the figurative level in order to identify the component parts, resulting the morphology of the brand a description by component parts and their relations with the whole.

The brand and its own identity are made by a multitude of discourses. This means that the identification of the identity of a brand and its pilot require the shaping of these various discourses and especially of their hierarchy.

The issue of hierarchy is of primary importance. Indeed, a large number of brand analysis schemes have been proposed in recent years.

But none of the various approaches based its arguments on a true theory of the brand, from which derives the analytical practices and research methodologies. This means that any system proposes its own scheme of classification of the different elements that characterize the identity of a brand, but provides no theoretical criterion to justify why an item is attributed to a certain level rather than another.

More important factor is that this hierarchy and its internal relationships are supported by a scientific theory, which shows the methodological rigourness of the system, its repeatability and the standardization of the analysis procedures.

Greimasian semiotics states that sense/meaning rises through generation and according a narrative logic. In other words, sense is produced because of a progressive enrichment starting from a fundamental basis made up only of the constituent values of a social group. Going back up to the discourse level, such deep elements are 'mis en scène' through narrative structures and are

furtherly enriched by pictures and objects taken from everyday life.

This course is the route the sense itself covers, at the end of which it is transformed in a determined significance. The generative course of significance foresees three steps or levels.

Significance level.

It is the starting level, the deepest one. It is made up of a limited number of core values that shape and guide the whole society.

It is at this level that we can find the founding values of the identity of the brand, the ones which give the brand sense, a plan and a cognitive desirability.

Here is the source of its identity, the level that ensures continuity and permanence of the brand over time and its capital of legitimacy and the involved audience memory.

It is possible to modify the significance level, but it is always a delicate and dangerous operation.

Narrative level. It is the intermediary level where the core values, deployed by the level of significance, are organized in stories or narratives, more or less explicit and more or less structured.

A narrative grammar allows to organize the core values and make them dynamic in a series of relationships such as opposition, research, lose and regaining, complicity, conflicts,...

As for brand identity, the organization of the narrative universe allows the brand to represent its values, providing the narrative structures and specifying which narrative role the brand gives itself.

Narrative level.

The narrative level translates the often implicit values of a brand into a racountable, explicit form.

At this level, the possible variants are numerous. Starting from an extremely limited number of core values,

which generate the deep level of significance of the brand identity, the narrative level can represent innumerable variants, on condition that they respect the fundamental principles of the narrative grammar.

Discourse level.

It is the most superficial level, where the core values and the narrative structures are enriched by images (objects, shapes, colors, materials).

At this level variability becomes infinite.

It is here that the characters get a face, a body, a style which allow them to contextualize, identify and differentiate themselves.

The elements of this level are extremely important relating to the implication and the acceptance of the universe they propose, but they are not the essence of identity.

The evidence is in the fact that the actor (discourse level) who embodies a character (narrative level) who expresses the basic values (significance level) can be modified time by time.

Nevertheless, even if the discourse level is not the most important for the recognizability and the affectivity of a brand, it is at this level that we find certain 'icons' of the brand identity, peculiar for its characterization with the audience and which allow economy in the narrative means.

Moreover, this level is the most sensitive to the socio-cultural context and to consumers' attitudes.

While the core values and the narrative structures have as definition of a very high degree of stability in a specific society, or they evolve in a very slow way, themes and figures articulated in the discourse level are subject to a faster usury.

Models' physical body changes according to the fashion of the moment, in the sports world, softer slipping sports have taken the place of more aggressive mechani-

cal sports, as a symbol of adventure Amazonia has taken the place of Sahara, and so on. Moreover, at this level there are 'themes' and 'codes' which usually represent the field of investigation privileged by the most of brand identity analysis systems.

Themes and codes ensure the contextualization and the anchorage of the narrative structures underlying a given universe. On their turn, such narrative structures allow the deployment, the telling of the fundamental values of the brand identity.

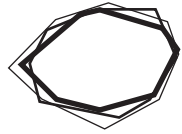
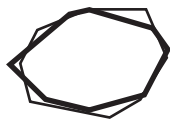
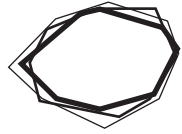
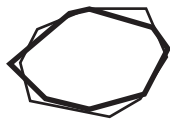
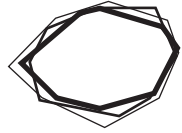
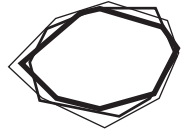
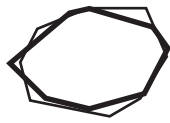
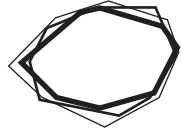
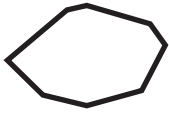
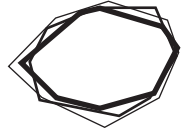
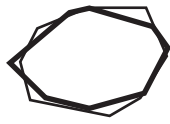
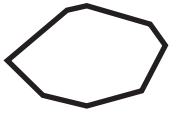
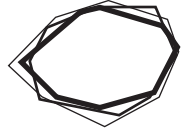
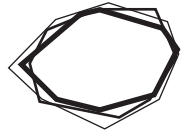
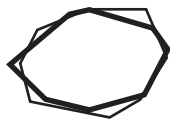
As said before, themes and codes have a great importance in memorising and recognizing a brand, but they do not represent its significance system, real source of identity and beating heart of the brand.

The interest and opportunity to rely on a scientific theory about the generation of significance semiotic should appear evident.

Structuring the different levels of significance generation and specifying the role of each level, the semiotic theory permits to distinguish, in the multitude of the signals emitted by and around a brand, the ones belonging to each level and, consequently, to identify what contributes to the stability and reproduction of the nucleus of the identity of a brand and what is a superficial manifestation, a historically and culturally determined variant in the realization.

Obviously, the signs belonging to the discourse level can be so strongly associated to the brand to become inseparable.

The identity of a brand lies in the whole of the three levels: values (significance level), their telling (narra-

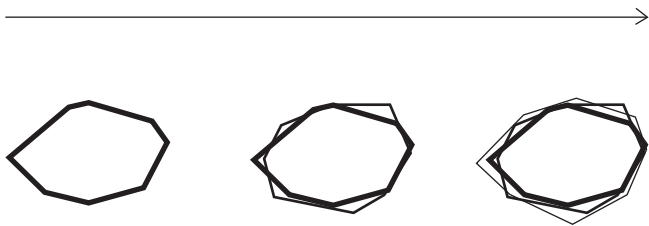


Two points of view

tive level), their representation (discourse level).
It is useful to remember the process of semiotic construction of a brand can be approached in two ways.

At the moment the analysis follows the internal view, that is the point of view of the brand strategy, where the system is considered starting from the core project to reach the superficial manifestations of the brand.

Internal view



External view

— Significance

— Narrative

— Figurative

Graph 2 Internal and external view scheme.

This track could be called *strategic*, as for the extent it generates manifestations on the basis of a previously planned project. But if we adopt the point of view of receivers, the brand audience, that is an external view, the track becomes a track of interpretation, the only accessible to the public.

People know the brand only through its manifestations, which represent the perceivable, visible sphere of brand, the only sphere they can experience and interact with.

Starting from the manifestations they receive as enunciations, receivers activate a process of interpretation in order to reconstruct the enunciation track and identify and extrapolate the project that has generated the manifestations. Receivers act as real semiotic detectives and they use the clues provided by the brand to reconstruct the project.

(Obviously, the manifestations of the brand have the aim to show the project as clearly as possible).

It is important to underline the double dynamics activated in the enunciation of the brand.

While the brand project belongs to the sphere of abstraction and aims at being translated into real manifestations, on the other hand, the receiver can only start from the tangible, from manifestations, to go back up to the project.

Hence, the observer always covers a 'backwards' analysis: starting from the discourse level, with its visible and perceivable elements, he passes through the narrative level, where the 'mise en scène' of the brand narratives are organized, and reaches the significance level, the seat of values and other fundamental elements which allow to recognize and understand the brand identity and its underlying project.

Once established the two possible points of views, we have to decide where our analysis must start from.

As we are specialists on field, our attitude will be that of laboratory researchers and not of mere receivers. Consequently, the most coherent way with our approach to the study of the brand is the internal view analysis.

There are different reasons for this:

as professionals, we are required to have scientific moods and methods

starting from the surface, that is from the external manifestations of brands, there is the risk of misunderstandings or mistakes, for it would mean an only partial access to the identity of the brand, because only one manifestation cannot give a complete, detailed description of the characteristics of a brand.

starting from the external view, we would meet firstly the most usable expression of a brand, therefore our track towards the core could be turned aside by the presence of very contingent elements.



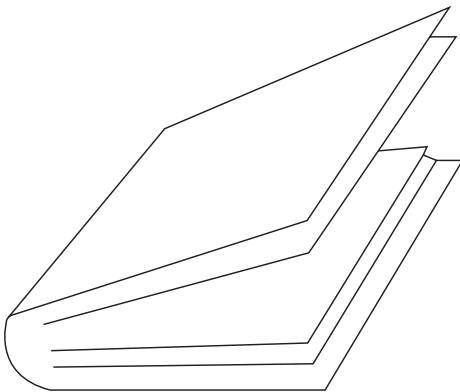
04 brand morphology

Who for?

For those concerned with brand system, ranging from professionals to amateurs, Brand Morphology is hopefully a valuable guide to the multifaceted labyrinth of brand.

It presents a functioning modeling of the system of brands. It analyzes how the brand works and how the brand project is conceived.

Brand Morphology aims to identify a classification system which allows a precise definition of the brand genome information.

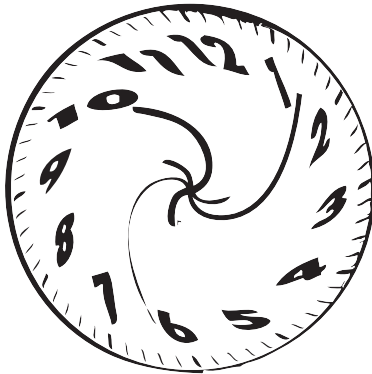


Time range

As brand systems are extraordinarily complex and changeable in time, it is important to fix a time interval on which to apply our analysis, before starting the research.

As seen before, the discourse level is made up of very usable manifestations, due to time and fashions, therefore fixing a time of application for the analysis helps to avoid obsolescences.

The range of time can be from one month to one year.



The analysis tool

In order to read the brand genome it is important now to detect and identify the three levels of depth.

This analysis will be carried out through three steps:

- A. brand genome filtering and leveling
- B. brand genome decoding
- C. brand genome mapping and visualization

A. Brand genome filtering and levelling

The first step is the one which will allow us to give a first filtering of the brand genome.

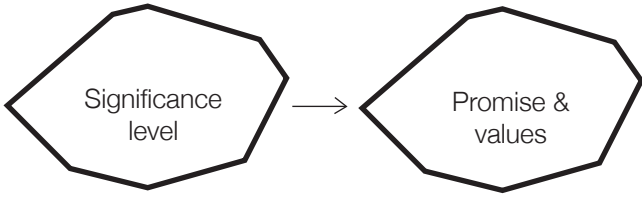
This means to find the frameworks in which we will operate to decode the brand.

Filtering phase results in the individualization of the three levels and their translation into actual contents (indicated by arrows)

Significance --> Promise and values

Narrative --> Self-identity

Discourse --> Figures and visual elements



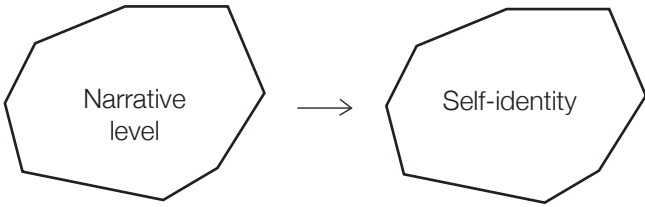
The promise is a free statement in which the brand commits itself to offer something to the users by using specific values. It is the equivalent of a two lovers' engagement or a boy-scout's promise.

A promise is something you can count on, an assurance, a commitment that something will happen. It's also meant to be used in a positive sense as an indication of future excellence or achievement.

In our case, a promise commitment is intended to communicate a genuine and positive expectation of distinctive functional and emotional benefits. The promise concept revolves around the importance of focusing on how a brand wants its users associate, influence, and feel.

THE PROMISE AND THE VALUES should be identified using few keywords and small sentences for a maximum of 30 words.

Graph 3 Moving from significance level to promise and values.



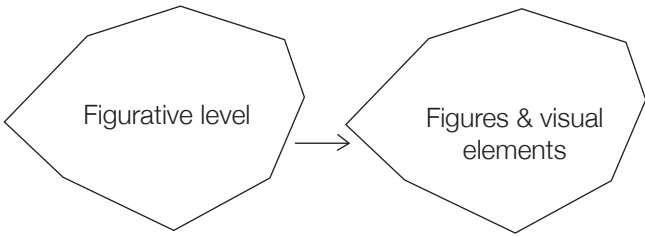
The self-identity is a multi-dimensional construct that refers to a brand perception of “self” in relation to any number of characteristics such as origins, receiver, field of action, aims and many others.

A personal narrative process is involved in the brand personal sense and in the creation and construction of memories.

(The self-concept is composed of relatively permanent self-assessments, such as personality attributes, knowledge of one’s skill and abilities, one’s occupation and awareness of one’s physical attributes.)

THE SELF-IDENTITY is a brief narrative in first person where the brand narrates itself, establishing the basis of its storytelling.

Graph 4 Moving from narrative level to promise self-identity.



A brand figure is the brand physical appearance. Also known as brand touch-point, it is all the different ways that a brand interacts with and makes an impression on users.

The brand figures and the visual elements are the physical interface of the core values organized in narrative structures and then expressed through figures.

Moreover figures are highly exposed to wear over time because more sensitive to the variations of time and space.

FIGURES AND VISUAL ELEMENTS, given a time of investigation, point out the products portfolio from a graphical point of view. The area of investigation is represented by images, visual elements, verbal elements, color palette and materials used.

Through this procedure, we have obtained three schemes with the primary components of the brand genome.

Now we need to decode such components and unveil the content of their information.

Graph 5 Moving from figurative level to figures and visual elements.

B. Brand genome decoding

After the first step of filtering and leveling into three layers, we need to decode the material obtained, so that to convert the achieved information into single elements. We pass from information distributed on levels to single elements, always organized according the hierarchy of the three depth levels.

Therefore, we have:

CORE ELEMENTS

NARRATIVE ELEMENTS

STYLISTIC ELEMENTS

CORE ELEMENTS

The core elements drive the brand organization. They are what the brand is about, what it stands for, what it believes in. Representing the most permanent part of a brand, they are the source of inspiration for the successive levels, being the latter a gradually more explicit interpretation of the former.

Core elements are:

Mission (M)

The mission statement guides the actions of the organizations, spells out its overall goal, provides a sense of direction, and guides decision-making.

It provides “the framework” or context within which the company’s strategies are formulated.

In turn mission can be divided into:

Goal (G)

Company’s ambition

Context (Cx)

Company’s circumstances and category

STORY ELEMENTS

Brands use specific elements to tell their story and to create special effects and empathy.

They are:

Settings (S)

They include the origins and the area of applicability in which a brand takes place. It initiates the main back-drop and mood for a story.

Settings are subdivided in:

Origins (O)

The place the brand comes from

Area of applicability (Aa)

Where the brand acts

Characters (C)

Participants in the story. It is possible to have more than one character in the same story and, in the case of brands, characters can be not physically consistent.

Protagonist (P)

It is the main character of the brand story.

Crucial Moment (Cm)

It is the climax of the story, where the story reaches its highest peak of meaningfulness.

Audience (Au)

It is the group of people who “listen” or “read” the brand.

STYLISTIC ELEMENTS

They regard all the formal elements that distinguish the brand touch-points (products, environment, communication, behavior) of a particular brand. They are the specific way in which is a brand narrated.

They are:

Colors (Co)

Color palette the brand decides to use both on his identity and products.

Shapes (Sh)

Forms and traits chosen by the brand

Materials (Ma)

Materials and finishing.

Language (La)

It identifies the style, the type of vocabulary used in the verbal communications of the brand.

Language can be:

Informal, type of vocabulary very similar to a daily spoken language, it includes the use of dialects slang expressions;

Medium, is typical of simple but compounded messages, it is used to entertain the interlocutor without being too formal. Vocabulary and syntax are processed;

Formal is cold, detached and objective. The vocabulary is studied but it is sober, clear and elegant.

Tone (T)

Colors, shapes, materials and languages, all together set up the brand tone.

The brand tone could be:

Dramatic, large volume, voice rich and full, dark and intense tone, strong accents;

Lyric, sweet and lovely voice, soft and bright, rich and full;

Light, bright and clear voice timbre, limited volume but very agile.

C. Brand genome mapping and visualization

After obtaining the decoding of materials, it is important and useful to visualize it.

Compiling and mapping correspond to Step 3 of the research projects and it is divided into two parts:

ELEMENTS SCHEME
COMPARISON GRAPH

ELEMENTS SCHEME

After translating all the information of the brand genome, we can try to transcribe all the elements of the brand genome so we can summarize them in a scheme. Elements scheme represents the juxtaposition of all the elements pointed out during the analysis, so that it is possible to realize the composition of a brand at a single sight

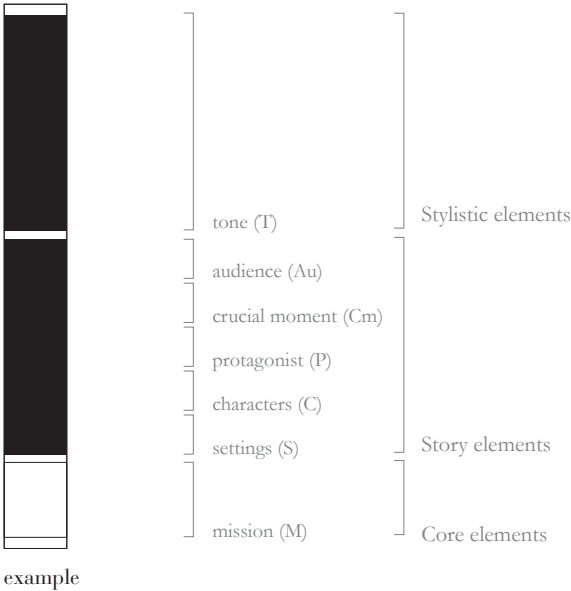
(G Cx) (O Aa) C¹ C² P Cm Au (Co Sh Ma La)
example

COMPARISON GRAPH

After identifying all the brand genome elements and the relative elements scheme, we can localize the results got.

The Comparison Graph is a tool which helps to visualize a comparison between two brands, finding where genetic traits are similar or where they are different. This graph has two levels of definition: *general and detailed*.

The general graph allows to visualize similarities and differences, taking into consideration the three groups of elements, while the detailed shows analytically the specific genetic traits.



Graph 6 Comparison graph.



05 wrapping up

Conclusions

At the end of the work, we do not want to summarise our findings once again, which all the work is dedicated to. We want just point out our conclusions, though apparently new, had been intuitively foreseen just by the Brand Strategist.

Indeed, even if there is a not always predictable user's reaction, generally speaking, the scheme decodified with Brand Morphology is nothing but a process of decomposition in reverse order to the initial brand strategy conception, a kind of backwards path (to reconstruct the original idea/genes).



06 foreword

One case demo



Apple Brand Morphology

Introduction

As Brand Morphology has presented and listed its own parts without referring to any specific case, the purpose of One case demo is to show a real and complete example of application of the analysis tool.



A. apple brand genome filtering and levelling

Promise and values

Significance level

- 6 Bringing the best personal computing experience to students, educators, creative professionals and consumers around the world through its innovative hardware, software and internet offerings. 9

ASAP

As Simple As Possible

Self-identity

Narrative level

Hi I'm Apple.

As a brand I was born in 1976 in Cupertino, California but now you can find me all over the world.

My fathers are Steve Jobs, Steve Wozniak and Ronald Wayne.

I use innovation and simplicity to help my users to cope with technology and computing.

Intuition is my approach to life, that's why you won't need too many instructions with me.

I'm a creative, I do like art and I dedicate to aesthetics as well as science.

With me you'll think different!

Figures and visual system

Figurative level



iPhone 4
This changes everything. Again.

Graph 7 Apple figures and visual elements, www.apple.com



B. apple brand genome decoding

Core elements

Mission (M)

Bringing the best personal computing experience to students, educators, creative professionals and consumers around the world through its innovative hardware, software and internet offerings.

Goal (G)

Provide innovative hardware, software and internet offerings.

Context (Cx)

Computer & technology.

Story elements

Settings (S)

Worldwide oriented.

Origins (O)

Cupertino, United States.

Area of applicability (Aa)

Usa, Europe, Asia.

Characters

Character 1 (C¹)

Being different.

Character 2 (C²)

Simplicity.

Protagonist (P)

The user.

Crucial moment (Cm)

To make the user feel different.

Audience (Au)

Mass oriented.

Stylistic elements

Colors (Co)

Vivid colors, defined, never mixed up.



Shapes (Sh)

Simple and functional.



Materials (Ma)

Glossy plastic, aluminium and colored aluminium.



Language (La)

Medium register, simple and direct.

Think different!

It's gorgeous. Inside and out.

Secure. Powerful. Compatible. Right out of the box.

* Tone (T)

Light, bright and clear voice timbre, limited volume but very agile.



C. apple brand genome visualization and mapping


Elements scheme

By the juxtaposition of all the elements pointed out during the analysis we can visualize Apple elements scheme.

(G Cx) (O Aa) C¹ C² P Cm Au (Co Sh Ma La)

M S C¹ C² P Cm Au T \longrightarrow P = Au

M S C¹ C² P Cm ~~Au~~ T

M S	C ¹ C ² C ³ P _(Au) Cm	T [■]	
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T[■] *Drammatic tone*

T[■] *Lyric tone*

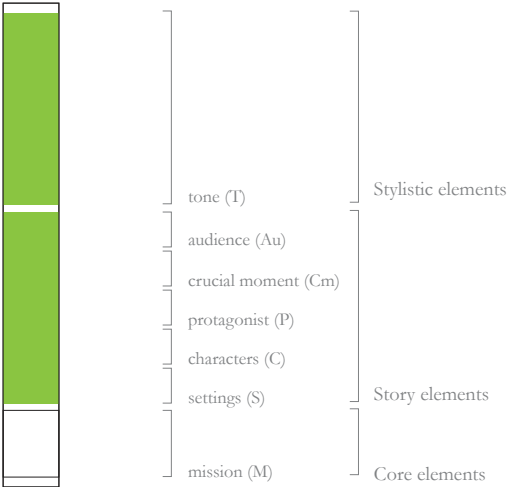
T[■] *Light tone*

Graph 8 Apple Elements scheme

Comparison graph

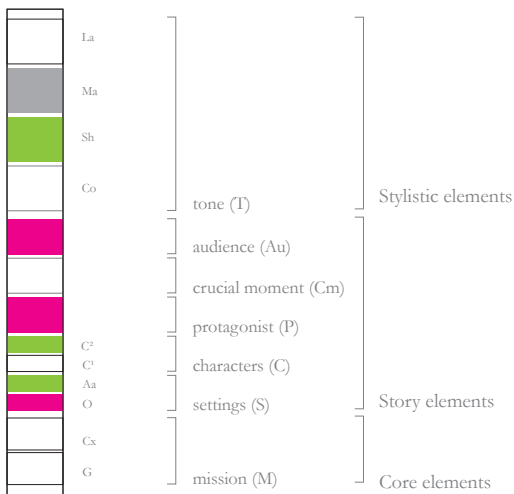
The comparison graph only works by the comparing a couple of brands, in this case it would be useless, but in order to show the procedure the example here is made by random data.

sch.1 | Genome general - comparison



Graph 9 Apple Comparison graph, general

sch.2 | Genome detailed - comparison



Estimates

- Partially identical
- Completely identical
- Not identical
- Not enough information

Graph 10 Apple Comparison graph, detailed

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