

Design, Visual Communication and Branding

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Edited by

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PREFACE

Technological advances associated to new ways of life, new social and consumption behaviours, are leading to changes in how organisations, businesses and brands develop branding systems, create their visual identity systems and how they communicate.

In this changing context, design processes develop in the face of new realities in the way of thinking, creating, and managing brands and their visual identity systems.

Contemporary brands benefit from several technological resources, namely AI, the internet, the internet of things, which support the definition of contents, supports and experiences to reach audiences that may be dispersed around the globe.

The pressure on businesses and brands is high, along with strong levels of competition and great demand and scrutiny by stakeholders.

On the other hand, the need for constant communication and real conversations between brand and audience were enhanced by digital communication, which brought about changes in branding, namely in design, in the media, in communication languages, in the relationship with audiences, in experience design, behaviour, culture and in brand management mechanisms. On the other hand, artificial intelligence has opened doors to other ways to deal with big data and to communicate with mass audiences, through the customization of messages or a one-to-one logic. Overall, the intersections between Digital Communication and Artificial Intelligence seem to point to a new reality in brand communication, which includes Computer Vision, Pattern recognition, changes in the design business and in the way communication design and branding are done.

Alongside technological potential, design is positioned to interpret and integrate data, helping brands to develop sustainable strategies from a human, financial and environmental perspective.

This book comprises the introduction and nine chapters developed as essays that can be read separately or as a volume correlated by design, communication and branding:

- The introduction sets out the main concepts as well as the changing landscape of branding, contemporary business, social and technology, explaining how they influence design, branding and communication.
- The first chapter explains corporate social responsibility and how design and brands can be reformist and mobilise causes and changes for the benefit of people and the world.
- The second chapter discusses branding as a strategic process and design thinking as a mind-set in developing a multi-sensory, more human and engaging brand experience.
- The third chapter discusses the changes in communication models between brand and its audiences, presenting the use of Neuro Design as a life of data collection and analysis on audiences and stakeholders.
- The fourth chapter is dedicated to the possibility of using the visual content publicly shared by users on the social network Instagram to understand what the audience of a particular place retains and the extent to which this information is relevant to solidify the DNA foundations of a place brand.
- The fifth chapter, explores dynamic identity systems, presenting the components that form them and proposing categories.
- The sixth chapter presents a historical overview of dynamic, fluid, or flexible visual identity systems and asks how various components can contribute to their emergence.
- The seventh chapter presents a proposed model for the creation of brand marks through comprehensive artificial intelligence.
- The eighth chapter analyses the form and discourse of visual identity narrative, presenting its dimensions and how they can explain how purpose has become the basis of contemporary brand history.
- The ninth and last chapter discusses the role of design and the designer in the contemporary context.

Daniel Raposo, 2022

INTRODUCTION

DYNAMICS OF BRANDING AND COMMUNICATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In the context of the new economy (Costa, 2009), increasingly, brands are the architecture of businesses. Both brand image and a business tend to be developed organically, which puts a special pressure on managing them in an integrated way (Shaoqiang, 2018).

Considering the brand as the nerve centre of business represents not only a reversal in the roles between brand-business, compared to the reality of previous centuries, but also requires the alignment of these two dimensions so that they form one single programmed front from one purpose and a defined Brand Image.

A brand is a network of intangible and interdependent concepts (its characteristics, purpose, basic concept, beliefs, and values) strategically created to identify, distinguish and positioning a certain entity, business, product, or service (what they stand for) and to generate the desired brand image.

The brand must be authentic, differentiating, and relevant, needing to be communicated explicitly and coherently, which implies collaborative work and a common culture shared by the organization's employees, because by itself the CEO is insufficient (Benbunan et al., 2019). Brand image is an ever-changing social phenomenon that requires brand management - Branding is the process of brand creation, attribution, and management.

Thus, brand management is the driving of a complex ecosystem conditioned by both internal and external factors to the organisation, requiring the prioritisation and monitoring of the brand across the various touchpoints (physical, audio-visual, digital or virtual), as well as the experience of stakeholders (Benbunan et al., 2019).

The Brand Picture consists in identifying the main characteristics of the brand at a given moment, helping to define the Brand Image, the desired

and idealized brand in a certain future (Davis, 2000), i.e., how the brand is intended to be perceived by the various audiences or stakeholders and it results in the planning of the Brand Identity and Brand Personality with a strategic sense (Raposo, 2018).

The brand identity includes a definition of purpose or greater cause, the reason why the brand exists and from which its mission derives. These concepts correlate with the vision and values of the brand, which together characterise the brand identity, personality, and positioning.

Thus, a planned brand starts with the definition of purpose (the reason why it exists in the world, the greater cause it represents for society, which gives rise to the mission) and Brand Personality (how we want the brand to be seen and valued by the public), which gives rise to strategies, goals, objectives and the management and communication program.

Although the term strategy is slightly used, it only exists when objectives, goals and tactical actions are defined with the respective monitoring instruments and indicators (the understanding of messages, the graphic components, contents, and most efficient means) or measurement of results (brand awareness and perception generated, number of impulses and mentions and financial return on advertising investment). In this sense, part of the strategic effectiveness of branding depends on how coherence with the purpose is maintained, how all forms of decision, brand communication and actions are coordinated so that they express a certain brand personality and positively generate the desired brand image.

For a strategy to be appropriate it needs to be created considering the technical, economic, and operational capabilities, as well as the ambitions and desires of the company, but also an informed knowledge of competitor practices and offers. On the other hand, the effectiveness of the strategy strongly depends on how all actions and operations are tactically matched and optimised so that the brand meets stakeholders' expectations and contrasts from competitors. The tactical options concern the position and organization in space and time, so that, successively, the components reinforce each other and lead to the desirable result in terms of information, communication, persuasion, sale or change in behaviour by the addressees (Calçada, 1997; Mozota, 2002).

A company cannot be understood outside its context or market, just as a brand only exists with the participation of its audiences and in comparison, to its competitors. Both the company and the brand must result from

programmed or intentional actions, combined with spontaneous behaviours of the players throughout the supply chain, as well as from tensions created by competitors and counterparts, consumer behaviours, social concerns, culture, technological, urban, and social developments, legislation and government policy, innovation factors, fashion phenomena or trends, among other factors.

An agile brand and communication management in constant transformation

Corporate sustainability and competitiveness require a link between brand and business or company. However, the difficulty of ensuring this requirement lies in the organic and dynamic nature of businesses and brands, insofar as both systems depend essentially on the interaction between individual or collective entities and their social and market dynamics.

In this context, Branding is a way of considering the organisation from a global and integrated perspective of management, production, promotion, sales, communication, and innovation activities. It is a way of understanding the whole by the combination of the parts and the components by their contribution to the system. Thus, management, design, engineering, marketing, communication, or production are components of a supersystem that is the brand. Or as Oliveira (2018) refers, Branding is a supersystem of management, monitoring and evaluation of the subsystems: management; strategy; visual; Texture and Environment Design; Financial and logistics; sensory and emotional; behaviour; brand.

Costa (2004) proposes to look at Branding from the perspective of interpersonal and corporate communication, defending a management model that articulates collaboratively instead of compartmentalising the various departments and teams of an organisation.

The system focuses on the proposal, on differentiation, on coherence, on communication and advertising, on the product-service-experience, on the particular and integral process, on the business-brand-communication-experience, being a global vision integrating languages, norms, actions, and results that obey defined principles and that are in constant transformation (Brea, 2020).

A brand strategy based solely on visual identity and style is hardly sustainable. The visual identity must be correlated with the other business dimensions along with all contact points, and the brand must be considered

as in an integrated system that is more than the sum of the parts. Branding is an opportunity to promote a corporate culture and an open design policy that values creativity and critical reflection, where ambiguity is possible, as well as answers that generate new questions or support the emergence of ideas and innovation. And the creation of a design culture implies availability, resources, and capabilities with equal complexity to that of the business challenges (Mootee, 2014).

However, every entity, business, product, or service aiming at selling and/or satisfying the needs of others must have a visual identity system and brand communication mediums (Lorenz, 2021).

A consistent and coherent visual identity system is not reduced to the similarity between two media, it is about the definition of a set of elements whose correlation creates a code and a visual brand language that is recognizable. The visual identity elements create an identification system by the properties which correlate them and that contribute to their partial or systemic recognition. On the other hand, the brand language system results from the application of design principles (graphic standards or selection criteria, adaptation, and use) that define proportions, rhythms, combinations, and contrasts that gain meaning in the complementary relationship between elements; a pattern of use that gives them unity and a certain meaning that is recognized as characteristic and differentiating of a brand.

In a semiotic perspective, the brand mark is a graphic sign (a pre-established element that stands for something absent, made present by invocation), while the visual identity system is a group of signs with rules of use that give them a meaningful relationship associable to the brand. In other words, the brand's visual identity is a set of signs, whose rules of use (code or design principles) constitute the visual language, ensuring both identification and differentiation as well as the construction of arguments, accounts and narratives associated with a given brand experience. It is not only about identifying and differentiating the brand, but also communicating how the organisation, business or brand is structured and what it represents or means by comparison to competitors and according to specific audiences (Raposo, 2012, 2018).

Specifically, the visual brand identity refers to the set of articulable components, to all the visible and tangible manifestations that can perform identification and differentiation functions of an organization, business, brand, product, or service, three-dimensional, graphic, audio-visual, or digital. Thus, the brand's visual identity includes components of landscape

architecture, architecture, interior design, stands and showrooms, wayfinding and wayshowing systems, the brand mark (logotype and/or symbol), the stationary, packaging, labels, uniforms, the vehicle fleet, merchandising, editorial design, advertising, digital correspondence, the website, advertising spots, among other media. The visual identity comprises dimensions of architecture and means of communication, information, and persuasion without being confused with them.

In a skilful and agile brand perspective, the objectives result from the desired brand image and the defined Brand Personality, the Visual Identity, the products, and services are defined and designed in the strategic plan, the media selection occurs in the tactical dimension and its implementation in the operational one.

Increasingly, the brand functions as an interface mediating a business (or an idea to which products and services are associated) with people whose ideals and life models are compatible with what the brand stands for. The visual identity is the visible part of this brand interface and therefore must be adjusted to the needs of use, communication, and people's behaviours.

The market is increasingly global, and communication and sales are mediated by the brand (including here communication and concrete actions), which tells us a lot about its importance in establishing a notion of brand value and positioning. On the other hand, the interlocutors of organizations, businesses or brands are no longer only consumers, but all people or stakeholders, those who may have direct or indirect impact by the brand's action.

Changes in the level of information and communication technologies, the rise of mobile devices connected to the internet, the internet of things, multinational companies and their global brands, socio-cultural changes and territorial brands are some of the factors contributing to place the brand in the centre of business and in people's daily lives (Olins, 2008).

To ensure the brand relevance it is necessary to guarantee that its purpose maintains its value, just as it is necessary to ensure a positive brand image, consistent and positioned in an explicit and advantageous way; and for this it is necessary that organizations know, always, their public, the stakeholders, what their competitors do and how the brand is understood and perceived.

On the other hand, in the context of markets and businesses, the challenges of an increasingly global and digital world are growing and changing, particularly in consumer behaviour, requiring the ability to adapt and

respond quickly. It is therefore frequent that many companies and brands face problems such as:

- Difficulties in adapting to emerging markets, which requires new standards and specific language codes.
- Difficulties in internationalization and adaptation to new markets with different aesthetic standards and legal regulations.
- Difficulties in flexible brand portfolio management, adapting to diverse cultures, ideologies, and languages.
- Difficulties in customizing products without compromising the range of products and maintaining the quality of each one.
- Difficulty in gaining scale without distorting the brand and maintaining quality.
- Difficulty in creating mechanisms to collect data on each market.
- Difficulty in managing data and obtaining information from them.
- Difficulties in managing the media and producing appropriate communication content.
- Difficulty in ensuring that the brand remains genuine, current, and relevant for diversified audiences, demanding personalized individual treatment.
- Difficulties in managing and adapting structurally and internally the company and the brand from external inputs, of which some weak signals.
- Difficulty in basing the tangible aspects of the business and the brand on its intangible components.
- Difficulty in embracing the possibility of making mistakes.
- Difficulty in making the business and the brand more flexible to keep up with the volatility of the contemporary world.

Organizations and brands are systems that integrate supersystems of great complexity and big data. In this context, understanding change, a minor problem, or a wicked problem (a complex problem that is difficult to solve, delimit or describe, which may result from other problems) implies navigating and understanding tensions and effects of physical, social (with emphasis on publics and stakeholders), psychological, cultural, technological, marketing, and economic systems.

Social media shows how people tend to replicate behaviours observed in brand advertising, across music bands and some of the behavioural patterns promoted by the cinema industry. Ultimately, people want to become icons or brands, aspiring to have followers. Alongside this, brands personify themselves and make us think, feel, and express with them.

If on the one hand the means of brand communication are increasingly becoming digital (the business card and the stationary have almost disappeared with the appearance of smartphones and email), socio-economic and cultural contexts that require printed media or the adaptation of contents and languages (such as the translation of the name and logo) persist.

Serial production and communication have given way to customization, segmentation, and hyper-segmentation (Lipovetsky, 2007). And social media, which increased the power of recipients and consumers to be producers of messages and establish a real dialogue with brands.

In this way, contemporary brands are more sustainable when they have a strong and flexible identity and visual language associated with agile media, as they allow to ensure the relevance of the brand and the rapid adaptation of the discourse to different cultures, audiences, places, platforms, or channels (Johnson, 2019).

Aggregate, integrate and transform - being smart

Most brands operate in international markets and national or regional brands are becoming the exception. We are witnessing a convergence between the local and the global, with global strategies for local adaptation, as well as between producer and consumer (who have the means to claim, contest, invest or co-create with the brand), between the physical and the digital, and between competitors and partners (Benbunan, et al., 2019).

The context of contemporary organisations and brands, with its complex problems, requires transdisciplinary knowledge and skills to identify, frame and interpret different and dispersed data, recognise limits and capabilities to do, detect alternatives and opportunities, empathy (Ito, 2016), and vision to value weak signals with value and aligned to the brand purpose.

There are opportunities to aggregate services that cross business categories or different brands, and may include participatory design, codesign, crowdsourcing (a method to aggregate input or money from consumers/investors, generating revenue, ideas, and opinions in the business-consumer community), design thinking to solve management problems or Cobranding, among other possibilities (Gray et al., 2010).

Cobranding is a partnership between two different brands that come together to create a differentiating service or product, which may result from

the complementarity of other pre-existing ones or from the combination of different competences that are only feasible in this partnership.

In general, in the context of cobranding, the brand with the greatest reputation and link to the product category is the one that takes pride of place, while the second is implicit.

In a global market, with a vast offer and strongly competitive, there are brands seeking to be more genuine, traditional, or personal (valuing the experience of proximity consumption in interpersonal contact), while others choose automation and algorithms (valuing distance purchasing processes, namely fitting rooms, or virtual avatars, in mirrors, mounts or through shops that promote a physical digital experience. In both cases, brands need to integrate in their own time, to connect with people, with their ways of life, their expectations and needs. The customization of Visual Identity, through flexible and dynamic systems accompanies the need for a communication, but close to the one-to-one.

However, the brand experience operates and combines the available sensory, scientific and technological resources, namely AI (Artificial Intelligence), Face Recognition (facial pattern recognition system); Eye Tracking (eye tracking system to measure movement, eye position, retinal opening and determine where a person is looking, what stimulated attention, the sequence and for how long); Biometrics (statistical study of physical or behavioural characteristics of living beings), neurosensory evaluation systems (cognitive, emotional and behavioural metrics); VOIP (Voice over Internet Protocol, routing of human conversation over the Internet or computer network), Vending (vending system); Virtual reality (to simulate the use of a certain product); Augmented Reality (overlay of digital contents, ad or bring more information or media into a screen display by video camera); Digital Assistants or Chatbots (to interact with human beings, clarifying doubts); Smart search (to optimize and customize searches within a virtual store); recommendation showcases (digital showcases according to the preferences of each consumer).

Artificial Intelligence includes Machine Learning and Deep Learning, which are ways of training models so that they classify data, often used in the detection and processing of data in complex scenarios, as well as in their analysis and evaluation of results (Gunkel, 2020), but also to improve the effectiveness and customization of brand communication.

In the case of Machine Learning, algorithms are used that learn from data, usually the patterns defined based on examples uploaded to the system, defined, and selected manually, labelled, and described by their distinctive features and classifiers.

The algorithm will use these patterns to make predictions or recognise objects or images. These systems can combine several features and do not require very powerful machines and can run on less data and get results faster, although it is more permeable to human error in tagging and therefore in the results. The process can be summarised as follows:

Images > features and classifiers > Machine Learning > Predictions or object Detection based on the recognition of its features.

As a sub-area of Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning does not have a manual learning process, being done directly by the machine from algorithms inspired by the structure and functioning of the human brain, called neural networks in which the inputs are interpreted in a crosswise manner and in different parts and in several layers. The images are interpreted by a sophisticated and complex algorithm that is more demanding on the equipment, being adequate when there is High-Performance Computing and Big Labeled Data: Images > Algorithm (Input layer, Hidden layer 1, Hidden layer 2, Output layer) > Object detection based on recognition of its features. Each neuron describes a part of the image and is activated when the data is deemed relevant, leading to a pattern of activations in the layer, which determines the activations in the next (Gunkel, 2020).

AI already has multiple applications, from the execution of repetitive and structured tasks that require relatively low levels of intelligence, the detection of Spam Email, to the association of recommended or customized content to the user on websites and social networks, the measurement of interest in the brand's offer or marketing efforts, the qualification of relevant content for each user (Marketing Qualified Leads and Sales Qualified Leads), to the App's allowing to take a picture or film the user and combine it with other objects such as glasses, hairstyles, shoes, clothing, in games, etc., which require the detection and recognition of objects. It also allows establishing patterns of behaviour, types of relationships between people, the level of knowledge, or human emotions from selfies and texts written and published on social media, identify fake news, as well as the geolocation of mobile devices. At the level of content production, among other examples AI can create images of objects or 3D scenarios with 2D photographs, audio,

or visual scenarios (digital projectable or visible through Spatial Computing and Multi-Dimensional techniques, 2D, 3D, VR, or combined), cropping, image treatment and video manipulation (for example the deepfake), animated image, illustrations or create brand marks (Pell, 2019).

AI allows large volumes of data to be aggregated, processed, and related to others from different sources, bringing together context and relevance, rising to personalized and collective insights or even smart data, which characterize, with unquestionable proximity, people, and consumers behaviour (Gunkel, 2020). In parallel, AI is also used to create more personalized ads by segments, regions or even specific to a single person, as well as in data visualization and design.

The dangers and challenges posed by AI, regarding each citizen's right to privacy, are simultaneous to its potential, namely by the way it allows to explore hyper-reality, with Augmented Reality to test products (an area well developed with confinement and distance sales in the context of COVID-19), obtain product recommendations or visualize previous similar decisions, which can be correlated with Virtual Reality (Pell, 2019). In terms of advertising, AI allows segmenting audiences based on preferences, interests, and needs, targeting the right person with the right ad (the insertion of advertising according to the user's profile and within contents consistent with the ad) to engage them and drive conversions, the insertion in real time of advertisements in live television filming, adapting the ad message and/or advertiser to each location where it is seen.

In summary

We observe a fragmentation of audiences in lifestyles and ideals, dispersed across the planet, demanding more information, more customised, more genuine (or even local, personal, or even offline) or creative and experience-based products.

The digitalisation of businesses followed the internationalisation of brands and increased with the confinement to fight COVID-19, which combines with several applications that were already underway at the AI level.

On the other hand, media diversified with the internet and intersect at increasing rates, and it is expected that the internet of things and AI will bring new scenarios of information consumption and products or services.

The availability of data on brand context (brand image, competitors, stakeholders, trends, preferences, etc.) has reached unprecedented levels, offering business opportunities that organizations let slip through their inability to deal with big data.

In a scenario of strong competition and great dispersion of information and vast offer, brand loyalty seems to be in danger and brands run a greater risk of losing value and relevance in a changing context.

AI seems to be able to support in the analysis of different and dispersed data, but also in the identification of trends, in the dialogue with interested recipients, in the creation of more intense user experiences, exploring emotions and customising content to consumers' expectations and needs, generating brand loyalty. And in this sense, it allows brands to be truly data-driven and to establish a dialogue with their true addressees.

As far as direct human intervention is concerned, the focus seems to be no longer on tactical operational components or on contents, but rather on creativity and strategy, on the contribution of design as an integrator and the brand as an argument.

Design intervention can occur at smaller or larger scales of brand systems, influencing their development and of their context (Ito, 2016). The designer has the opportunity to be a catalyst for positive change in integrated systems which include economic capital, social, political, productive, natural and human systems to generate and sustainable people-focused solutions (Fuad-Luke, 2009).

Generally speaking, brand communication is organised into actions or campaigns with specific strategic, tactical, and operational options. Usually, a multimedia or intermedia strategy consists of presenting a content in several media and formats, while in crossmedia strategies, messages complement each other in a network (they can be sequential) and by people's participation, resulting from the need to adapt and diversify communication to a wide variety of media platforms, with the purpose of obtaining a higher profit margin or reinforcing each component through cross promotion between platforms. On the other hand, the transmedia strategy is crossmedia, in that it also includes the use of multiple platforms and physical, virtual, digital, static, or interactive formats, as well as the possibility of user participation, but contains a single-story that is told in a characteristic way (style, tone and rhythm), making use of storytelling to humanize and increase the effectiveness of the messages that form a coherent whole (Ibrus

& Scolari, 2012). In summary, multimedia allows increasing the number of visual impulses and contact points between brand-public, crossmedia relates the message and the media, promoting interaction and deepening the information, while transmedia allows telling a complete story, in excerpts or sequels, which can suit different segments and audience profiles.

The complexity of the market and the diversity of audiences, segments and diversity of brand communication media require flexible and diversified systems (Lorenz, 2021). In this sense, the success of a brand depends on its ability to adjust to the human, technical, social, economic, and cultural reality of an era.

Flexible or dynamic visual identity systems are ways for brands to respond to the fast-changing environment, namely a way of adapting to audience diversification and segmentation (van Nes, 2012). It is imperative that designers adopt new ways of analysing and responding to diverse changing contexts (Neumeier, 2006). Instead of small visual identity systems, strongly based on a version of brand mark complemented by a restricted group of elements such as colour, label, packaging or stationery, flexible visual identity systems offer a repertoire of graphic-semantic components and a combination program with multiple possibilities (Lorenz, 2021).

The complexity and flexibility of the visual identity system should result from the circumstances of the brand, its market and communication needs. The contemporary brand mark must be applied in a wide variety of physical media (print, products, uniforms, buildings, etc.), digital on websites, mobile applications or multiple devices with different screen sizes and resolution or video. This diversity of applications demands flexibility and scalability from the brand mark (Shaoqiang, 2018).

The flexibility of a brand mark can be achieved with a responsive design, which allows the use of components as parts of a system with various combinations or only one element of it that works as a graphic synthesis in limit reduction situations such as the favicon - the initial of the logotype or the symbol are the most frequent ones because they are more characteristic and easier to identify (Shaoqiang, 2018). The design of the brand mark as a system requires the selection of its components and the definition of principles and rules to combine them. It is about thinking of the brand mark as a system within a larger one that is visual identity.

A dynamic or flexible brand mark offers several possibilities for application and may appear in static mode (if printed it will appear with multiple

variations in the various media) or animated (in digital, video, AR, VR or other projection and display technologies).

The dynamic visual identity system is defined by the principles of use / combination of its components: the brand mark (logo and / or symbol), colour, typography, graphic elements, imagery, and language (van Nes, 2012).

There are flexible visual identity systems created from the brand mark and that operate in a complementary plan, and there are other systems that work in the inverse relationship. In both cases, the effectiveness of the visual identity system depends on the individual suitability of the visual components, but mainly on the design principles (rules of use or combinatory standards), which give it coherence and common, distinctive, and recognizable characteristics.

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From his recent books stand out:

O 5º Elemento nas Marcas (Fless, 2021); Advances in Human Dynamics for the Development of Contemporary Societies. AHFE 2021 (Springer, 2021); Driving Industrial Competitiveness With Innovative Design Principles (IGI-Global, 2020); Advances in Design, Music and Arts (Springer, 2020); Perspectives on Design and Digital Communication: Research, Innovations and Best Practices (Springer, 2020); Perspective on Design: Research, Education and Practice (Springer, 2020); Communicating Visually: The Graphic Design of the Brand (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Hardback, 2018 and Paperback in 2019 and in Spanish published by Experimenta, Spain, 2020).

CHAPTER 1

THE EMERGENT CONVERGENCE BETWEEN DESIGN ACTIVISM AND BRAND DESIGN

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Brand design

At its very core, design aims to influence on the preferences and behaviour of individuals – whether they act on behalf of themselves only, their family or peers, company or community. Product design and so-called industrial design do so by providing a physical and/or functional solution, object or artefact that intrigues us or facilitates our choice, to do something different, or do what we always did, but differently than before. Spatial design encourages us to interact with our physical environments in novel ways. Service design influences our behaviour by facilitating transactions between a service provider and a recipient – that’s the very definition of the genre. Process design and organizational design aim to enhance the effectiveness of processes, and communication design aims at influencing our ideas, our perception and our preferences through words and images and compelling visuals. Very roughly laid out, but still valid; the objective of most design activity is to mend or improve what is already there, or to introduce new and attractive alternatives, and almost irrespective of the point of departure and the ideals of the designer, to *devise courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones* (Simon 1969, 130), as formulated by Herbert Simon, half a century ago.

Branding and brand identity design is generally regarded as a sub-genre of graphic design, communication design and visual communication, and perhaps the most purebred commercial discipline on the design palette. Its objective and legitimacy lie in the ability to influence people’s perceptions of and attraction to a specific company, product or service, its identity and brand, and to ultimately influence people to desire or even choose to buy the products or services of one brand origin as opposed to its competitors in

any given market category. And it works. As a matter of fact, brand design is widely accepted as a cornerstone in any market driven system or infrastructure, and good brand designers are in high demand. However, influencing on the preferences and behaviour of individuals in a typically saturated marketplace, is rarely a quick-fix. It requires the ability to coherently communicate the values and intrinsic qualities of the brand itself, its behaviour vis-à-vis its clients, but also vis-à-vis the world at large – in addition to the advantages of their offerings, whether product, services or any other proposition to which they invite potential clients to subscribe. More and more often, companies’ “behaviour vis-à-vis the world at large” plays a vital role when people make their choice of brand to accommodate their needs, and much speaks in favour of the behaviour and responsibility demonstrated by companies becoming even increasingly important looking forward. This is a probable assumption for several good reasons. It’s expected from companies to take some sort of responsibility for their local community or the world, depending on their size, sector and strategy. The demands for accountability with regard to the social and environmental footprints of any commercial activity is increasingly being built into the annual reporting of companies, alongside purely financial and strategic, components. And – it’s good for business. In a recent article in Forbes Magazine, five factors are listed as reasons why it is important for companies to prioritize social responsibility (Heyward, 2020);

CSR can help attract and retain employees

CSR can improve customers' perception of a brand

CSR shows a sign of accountability to investors

CSR saves money

CSR can enable better engagement with customers

Those all make a whole lot of sense, and from being something only a select few companies, often leaders of their packs, had the luxury of indulging in, corporate social responsibility – for the lack of a better way of framing an often cynically calculated investment in “being good” – has become a standardized component of how a brand decides to portray and reflect its values and intrinsic qualities and its behaviour vis-à-vis the world at large; of brand identity and communication, hence also of brand design.

Design for the world

Design as a means to address global challenges is nothing new. The role of design – including its societal role – has been a topic for discussion and exploration for decades. Victor Papanek was among the most articulate design thinkers arguing the need to discuss design’s role as instrumental to creating a better, more just and equal world. In his book, *Design for the Real World*, Papanek claims that: “*Design must become an innovative, highly creative, cross-disciplinary tool responsive to the true needs of men*” (Papanek 1971,15) and, “*The ultimate job of design is to transform man’s environment and tools and, by extension, man himself.*” (Papanek 1971,42). In 1990, the University of Illinois at Chicago hosted a small international conference entitled *Discovering Design*, boasting some of the greatest design thinkers of our time; Richard Buchanan and Victor Margolin, who organized the conference, as well as John Heskett, Nigel Cross, Augusto Morello and others. Two out of the five sessions focused on this “non-commercial” role of design; *Design and action*, focusing on “*how products can be made consonant with the qualities of human action and how they can be integrated into the lives of users*” and *Design and values*, exploring “*the relation between design and individual, cultural and social values.*” (Buchanan and Margolin 1995, 245) While varying in intensity, and without claiming that the Chicago conference was its cradle, the overriding theme of design’s role in shaping our societies, our environment and the future has had its place in the design discourse since then. Looking at our most recent history, in particular two factors have influenced the discourse on design’s potential and significance as a lever of change for good.

One such factor was the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, ratified by all 193 member countries of the United Nations, hence a historic unification on account of the acknowledgement of the most imminent challenges of the world and humanity. These seventeen, rather simple headings – almost banal, one might argue, encompassing No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Well-being, Quality Education, Gender Equality, Clean Water and Sanitation, Affordable and Clean Energy, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, Reducing Inequality, Sustainable Cities and Communities, Responsible Consumption and Production, Climate Action, Life Below Water, Life On Land, Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, and – finally – Partnerships for the Goals, have made a world of difference, literally speaking. From having to hire expensive consultants and PR wizards to figure out and articulate a company’s social and environmental engagement, a universally known and understood framework now exists, and the

discussion can begin. The CSR Report 2018, published by the Global Sustainability Index Institute (UNGSII) shows an encouraging “corporate” response to the SDGs: *A recent survey of over 1,000 CEOs from around the world by the UN Global Compact and Accenture found that 87 percent “believe the SDGs provide an opportunity to rethink approaches to sustainable value creation.” Another 70 percent of those CEOs “see the SDGs providing a clear framework to structure sustainability efforts.”* (Schatz and Vollbracht 2018, 6)

Another factor – even more recent and omnipresent – is the outbreak of and global submission to the Covid-19 pandemics, or rather what it has entailed in terms of design awareness and engagement. We’ve seen a mind-blowing level of civic engagement and creativity. New grass-root movements have emerged, developed services, established distribution channels and filled unmet needs. Mostly on a volunteer basis, but still a manifestation of the spare creative capacity out there. And for those, who were lucky enough to hold on to their jobs, new ways of working grew out of needs and accumulated, however often scattered experience; ways, which overnight became the rule rather than the exception. Never before have digital capabilities been boosted as fast and as effectively among baseline users as during the course of 2020. Painfully aware of the fact that it’s not nearly over yet, in the aftermath of crises, great visions are born, new stories and new identities. Never before were challenging assumptions; the very core of design practice, more appropriate – more important. And never before did design capture as many agendas simultaneously.

Design for the world – which as an anecdote was a whole-hearted and ambitious, however unfortunately premature initiative taken by the international design organizations ICSID (now World Design Organization), IFI and Icoграда (now Ico-D), as a platform for design as a means to address global challenges – first of all reflects the very nature of design; the urge to challenge and improve the existing and the persistent belief in the power of what design can do. Over the last couple of decades, the altruistic role of design, as well as the focus on solving “wicked problems” has captured an increasingly dominant portion of the design discourse. *Design is increasingly involved in the discourse around so-called “wicked” problems – either because we are complicit in their creation or drawn to the complexity of design opportunity that surrounds them.* (Beirne 2014, 1) This has been reflected in the emergence of sustainable design master programmes, in design research, in countless books about social design and design for sustainability and in award schemes, such as the INDEX Award, with its tagline “*Design to improve life*”.

Parts of the design community have adhered to the idea that design is more than adding panache to products to justify a higher price, or to add allure to the identity of a brand, for decades, spearheaded by pioneers like Victor Papanek and Victor Margolin, and even Ray and Charles Eames. In an article about design for the triple bottom-line, I made an attempt about a decade ago, at capturing what design is all about – rather than what design is; *“Design is about attractiveness, sensuality, aesthetics, and functionality, about real people and real problems, about individuals and their encounters with systems, about encouraging responsible behaviour and choices, about challenging our prejudices, about fellowship and ownership, and about expressing identities for individuals, groups of individuals, corporate entities and society at large. It’s true; design is all about people, profit and planet.”* (Valade-Amland 2011, 17) Only a few years ago, the international design community truly united in a vision for what design can be; *“Design is the application of intent: the process through which we create the material, spatial, visual and experiential environments in a world made ever more malleable by advances in technology and materials, and increasingly vulnerable to the effects of unleashed global development.”* (The Montreal Design Declaration 2017)

What is more novel is, that even the world around the design community now seems to embrace design’s potential as a means to create a better future. In October 2020, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, introduced her idea for how to support the “European Green Deal” – the overriding strategy for delivering on the commitment that the EU will be climate neutral by 2050. The idea was conceived in recognition of the “original” Bauhaus movement that was founded in Weimar, Germany in 1919, and which some years later became a powerhouse of creativity and ingenuity in Dessau. This movement, according to von der Leyen *“literally helped shape the social and economic transition to an industrial society and the 20th century.”* A century later, the same creativity and ingenuity is called for to address the challenges that we currently face; *“This is why we will launch a new European Bauhaus movement - a collaborative design and creative space, where architects, artists, students, scientists, engineers and designers work together to make this vision a reality. The New European Bauhaus will be a driving force to bring the European Green Deal to life in an attractive, and innovative and human-centered way. It will be a movement based on sustainability, accessibility and aesthetics to bring the European Green Deal closer to people and make recycling, renewable energies and biodiversity natural.”* (von der Leyen, 2020)

Such a commitment from the pinnacle of politics in our part of the world not only defines both political, corporate and civic agendas across the continent, it also acts as a new mandate and an enormous encouragement for millions of individuals. As the world reveals its vulnerability to over-exploitation and the wounds humanity has inflicted on it, the urgency of pitching in with whatever each and every one of us can spare becomes more and more pronounced. For most of us, that means that we try to contribute wherever and with what we have to offer, and to the extent to which our lives allow us to. For some, however, the urgency becomes unbearable and triggers a shift of focus. For some, the common good and the pursuit of a more sustainable world and future become driving forces and the very purpose of both personal and professional lives. Many designers choose to this route of action; they become design activists.

Design activism

Over the last couple of decades, the concept of design activism has emerged and plays an increasingly important role for individual designers and great parts of local as well as the international design communities. *At the root of the concept of design activism is the philosophical and ethical position that design in the service of society has to embrace democracy. This contrasts with design in the service of a client where it has to embrace the client's contract and, but not always, the client's philosophy and ethics.* Moreover, *Design activists can contribute to dialogic discourse about new social goals and, in doing so, the creation of new social values.* (Fuad-Luke 2009, 196) Design activism is no longer a peripheral and obscure corner of design practice. In design education and research, as in small and large design studios and corporate, in-house design departments, an increasing number of designers acknowledge their role and responsibility as instrumental to what our future looks like. From being regarded as somewhat rebellious, design activists are now beacon lights of hope and purpose for design students and young designers, while leading design agencies like IDEO and Frog have tamed their own desires to do good, so that design activism and design business go hand in hand. While this has been more obvious and possibly easier to attain within design disciplines like product and service design, the activism potential of communication design has been questioned. A Danish study from 2016 explores the hypothesis that despite its persuasive approach, graphic design, and its relation to commercial design culture in a consumerist economy, lacks activist potential and thus social impact. (Bichler and Beier 2016, 1-10) While pointing to a series of limitations of “*mere imitations of corporate campaigns that lack disruptive*