

Research paper

PhD thesis

Working Title: "The relationship between the brand and the product"

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Summary

This thesis questions the role of designers when it comes to build a brand. It builds its argumentation upon product as part of a brand identity for a company. It also discusses design research and methods in this research field.

Approach - Role of designers in building brands

In early nineties the emphasis on branding was merely about designing a logo or a corporate identity profile (Ollins 1989). During the last ten years to build a brand is more about communication a vision in the whole organisation. Strong brands have gone beyond being a trademark people recognise. The organisations behind the strong brands have managed to build what David Aaker call a *brand identity*: "*Brand identity should help establish a relationship between the brand and the customer by generating a value proposition involving functional, emotional or self-expressive benefits*" (Aaker 1996, p. 78) The brand in this meaning is not any longer only a name customer can rely on, it is about adding value or offering an identity. This holistic approach is used in several papers published concerning brand and design (Karjalainen 2004, McCormack, Cagan and Vogel, 2004), and is what I build my understanding of what branding is about.

When it comes to the designer's role according to brand building, it could be explained from three different perspectives. First is the designer as a carrier, a problem solver or a decorator (Norman 2004, Pye 1978). How should brand identity be represented in products, commercials or graphics? Second is the designer as a strategist (Cooper and Press 1997). How to implement a common understanding of the brand as a product or a symbol in the organisation? This can be a strategic document of how to control the brand identity. Third is the designer as a promoter for

social values (Cooper and Press, p 83, 1997). How can brand building be any good for the society?

Background

Some people may think that building a brand is only managers responsibility, and that product designers work do not have anything to do with building a strong brand. The development of the field of branding and how brand identities start to integrate every level of organisations makes it important for designers to develop their knowledge of brands.

The changing roles of industrial design are close to the development of business. In the beginning of 20th century the main focus in business was concentrated around manufacturing. The most important man or woman in the company was the engineer striving to increase the technical or functional quality in the product. In the mid 1950's the strategic position in the market became more and more important as an element of growing competition. Today we are facing growing complexity in markets as a result of increased numbers of products and possibilities for multi channel marketing. This has created both awareness and tiredness of commodities. (Cooper and Press 1997) The answer of today business is to develop strong brands. (Aaker 1996) Companies need to communicate their vision clearly and efficiently to gain market position. (Rijkenberg 2004) This PhD thesis will question what impact this have for the designer.

Theoretical fundament – design contribution in brand literature

Looking into what have been published during the last year in the Design Journal and Design Issue, two leading journals in design research, there are only a few papers published how design relates with brand identity. The essence of one of these papers was to develop a strategic tool to build a consistent brand in products. (McCormack, Cagan, Vogel 2004) Another contributing to the field is Toni-Matti Karjalainens dissertation "*Semantic Transformation in Design*". (Karjalainen 2004) This dissertation takes a closer look to Nokia and Volvo design strategies and how they are working to transform their identity into products.

The Design Management Journal is a journal where people with a variety of disciplines publish. It is mostly practitioners that publish in this journal, but once a year they publish a journal with an academic focus.

Looking into books published of branded companies the variety is broad. They do not follow criteria for scientific knowledge when it comes to validity or need of generalisation, but are useful as corporate references. In the field of management literature the spectre is broader. David Aaker's holistic approach to brands is the understanding of brand identity that the discussions in the paper are based on.

Material and methods - Design research a "mode 2 research"

Design can be described as *making profession*. In the article "*Towards a disciplinary identity of the making professions*" Dunin-Woyseth and Michl argue for the fact that *making profession* is on its way to define itself as a science community. On its way

since *“the making professions can hardly be ascribes a status of an academic discipline as they stand.”* (Dunin-Woyseth and Michl 2004). Doing design research is therefore also about discussing how the development of design research should be.

Research can be understood in a mode 1 and a mode 2 context like Arild Walther-Jacobsen among others defines it. (Walther-Jacobsen 2004) Mode 1 research is research as we understand it today. A strong community, hierarchy, disciplines defines what a research problem is and what is not. Mode 2 has a more organic approach. The scientific problem is in the centre, and people from different disciplines are welcomed to work with the problem. The question is not who should solve the problem, but how to do it.

The design community may be open for mode 2 approaches to science. There may be opening for an experimental approach to science in the understanding of mixing methods, ideas and concepts. It can also allow a practical approach to problem solving instead of a strictly theoretical. Practical skills have a high status among designers, perhaps even higher status than academic titles and published articles. To be able to develop the design as an academic discipline the solution may be in mode 2 thinking.

The problems posed in this PhD work emerges from outside of a scientific context and they demand a joint collaboration between scientists and practitioners. The research area has been discussed with practitioners to find potential research questions. Another criterion that is important is that knowledge gained from trans disciplinary research maintain the character of public good. The last criterion they point out is that the knowledge gained should be communicated in a widely accessible way, thus requiring hermeneutical skills of the actors involved. One of the criterions of success of this research, since it deals with both design and design management, both with scientist and practitioners, is the ability to make it accessible to a broad audience.

Addition

I started my PhD thesis at the Oslo School of Architecture, Department of Industrial Design in September 2004. I did my master thesis at the same department. During my studies I undertook a semester at the ENSCI, Les Ateliers in Paris.

Relevant work experiences are freelance working as designer and a student assistant job at AHO in Basic design – Three-dimensional Visual Analyses. I am working to establish a company working with brand building and packaging design.

During this autumn I will need to decide topics for three papers. I therefore welcome the opportunity Nordcode gives to discuss the questions with people working with design research.

Publishing

I have planned to publish three papers during my PhD thesis. I have started to do the literature research and formulate the research questions.

Working title: Trans disciplinary research. Ethic and brand (How brands can save the world or not:)

This paper is discussing critics raised around brand. It is discussing the designer's role in developing values in products and how this affects the society. It will especially question the design role as described: *Design both reflects and seeks to promote the changing values.* (Cooper and Press 1997)

Working title: Subliminal message in the body of a product

I am looking closer into the designer's practical work by developing brand identity. I will look closer into the question if it is actually possible to define some guidelines in how to ensure a company vision through product design. A study of different brands over time, and changes in the style of the product could be conducted. In this study it could maybe be interesting to look further into successful three-dimensional logos like the coca-cola bottle, or product which have changed dramatically during the time.

Working title: Designer contribution in brand context (summary)

This paper is discussing the role of designer in a brand context. This paper will go through different statements of what a designer is. It will address the two papers above.

Work schedule

Autumn 04

Module 1 Research training program
Choose relevant method
Mapping relevant partners/network
Mapping the field of theory in design and design management

Spring 05

Module 2 Research training program
Network/seminars
Mapping relevant partners/network
Mapping the field of theory in design and design management

Autumn 05

Module 3 Research training program
Network/seminars
Defining research questions.
Mapping relevant partners/network
Start research paper nr 1

Spring 06

Seminars
Continue research paper nr 1
Starting paper nr. 2

Autumn 06

Seminar
Starting paper nr. 3

Spring 07

Publication of papers
Evaluation
Seminars

Autumn 07

Discussion of the three papers
Concluding remarks

Spring 08

Disputation

Literature list

Literature list

Aaker, D. A. (1996) *Building Strong Brand*, The Free Press, New York

Aaker, D. A. and Joachimsthaler, E. (2000) *Brand Leadership*, The Free Press, New York

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Karjalainen, T. (2004) *Semantic Transformation in Design*, University of Art and Design Helsinki, Finland

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Walther-Jacobsen, A. (2004), "Approaches to Scientific Practise and Tran disciplinary Research", *The Nordic Reader 2004*, Oslo School of Architecture, Norway

Seminars

NordCode, Trondheim may 2005

Rijkenberg, Jan "Concepting: creating Successful brands in a communication-oriented area", Seminar by ANFO, "Branding Trends i et norsk og internasjonalt perspective, nov. 2004