Branding "for All": Toward the Definition of Inclusive Toolkits of Analysis and Visual Communication for Brand Identities

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Abstract. The construction of brand identities today can not be reduced to a simple set of attributes that consumers/users just accept consenting and as a closed box. It is rather a system that, in a society inclusion-oriented, increasingly appears as the result of an ideal alchemy between social and product values, emotional and rational contents, collective and corporate cultures. the brand/visual designer needs to have conceptual and methodological tools useful to identify, manage, and validate objectively the complex system of the design requirements for a brand identity and a visual identity that are really "inclusive". The paper presents a reflection on the issues of brand identity and brand design related to the Design for All approach.

Keywords: Brand identity, Visual brand design, Design for All.

1   Introduction

A person is on "identity crisis" when he loses his self awareness: he no longer knows who he is and where to place himself. The identity of an individual, in the broadest sense of the term, refers first of all to his self-perception. But it is also referred to his belonging to a particular social group, to a professional category or simply to his level of education or to the manifestation of his own interests. The concept of identity, however, can be widely referred to places, organizations, corporations, and institutions: they are all entities referable to the idea of Brand.

At the same time the concept of Brand, which initially indicated a name, symbol, drawing or a combination of them to identify products or services of a seller, from the 90s has gradually abandoned its traditional meanings and application areas related to markets: a brand is no longer simply the label, logo or symbol of a company; it is rather an idea of a possible world, an highly symbolic area, applicable also to places, regions, events or individuals.

The concept of Brand, therefore, today relates closely to the concept of identity. If, in fact, the identity of an organization of a territory or of an individual is expressed through a set of traits, symbols, meanings, and values of the features that make it recognizable, the Brand is precisely the all of those meanings, values and resources,

which must be communicated through symbolic elements, text, images, products and services, in order to allow its enhancement, recognition and detection. and Brand design, that refers to design and management of all communicative artifacts, has undergone a radical transformation in recent years.

Considering the complexity of the issues involved, the construction of brand identity today can not be reduced to a simple set of attributes that consumers/users just accept consenting and as a closed box. It is rather a system that, in a society inclusion-oriented, increasingly appears have to be necessarily generated through complex dynamics of interaction between transmitter (company/institution), receiver (consumer/user) and context (physical/social). It 's the result of an ideal alchemy between socialand product values, emotional and rational contents, collective and corporate cultures. The brand identity is increasingly based on innovative sharing contents rather than on prescriptive strategies of persuasion. No longer an authoritarian and exclusive branding, based on the extreme fragmentation of the target, but a shared and inclusive branding, that more and more must refer to the valuesof diversity and equality, precisely belonging to the emerging approach of Design for All, which considers the diversity among individuals and the participation of the beneficiaries of the project as a resource rather than as a limit for the project.

At this point the brand/visual designer needs to have conceptual and methodological tools useful to identify, manage, and validate objectively the complex system of the design requirements for a brand identity and a visual identity that are really "inclusive". The paper presents a reflection on the issues of brand identity and brand design related to the Design for All approach. In particular, it presents the results of a specific research carried out in the Department of Architecture at the University of Chieti-Pescara (Italy).

2   Objective

With regard to this problematic framework, the paper presents a reflection on the issues of brand identity and brand design related to the Design for All approach. In particular, it presents the first results of a specific research, that is still in progress, carried out by Inclusivo, a Spin off of the University of Chieti, Pescara (Italy), in the Department of Architecture at the same University.

The overall objective of the research is to identify a methodology to define objective criteria and guidelines of an "inclusive" visual brand identity.

The specific objectives of the research are:

— Define a first set of tools useful for the designer to identify, in a participatory manner and according to the inclusive criteria of Design for All, the values of a brand identity;
— Define a second set of tools useful to analyze, in an objective and complete way, the communicative aspects of the current "visual manifestations" of brand identities and the difficulties and capabilities expressed by the multiusers interacting with it;

— Define a third set of tools useful to to identify the   most promising "strategies" and requirements for the construction and communication of identity itself, strictly connected with the general principles of equality, diversity and inclusion promoted by Design for All.

This third specific objective of the research, as well as part of the secondare still at an early stage of methodological approach, so it isn't presented in this paper.

3   Method

The development of the tools took place in several stages, starting with a specific case study: the definition of the brand identity of the "G. d'Annunzio" University of Chieti-Pescara.

In particular, the research was carried out along two different ways of "understanding" the identity of a brand: from inside and from outside.

The first way, which starts from the internal dimension of the brand, describes the identity of the brand through a set of values and fundamental statements. The second way, that in an opposite movement, starts from the external dimension of the brand, builds the identity through the analysis of the communication system of elements as well as artifacts through which the brand manifests itself and is, therefore, perceived. The description of this double movement is based on the model form developed for the construction and analysis of the identity of a brand called "Project/Manifestations Model " [1]. This model combines the brand to a process of enunciation that is characterized by two levels: the level of the "project of the brand", which processes the real raison d'etre of the brand, and the level of "manifestations", in which the brand expresses his project.

3.1   The Identity "from the Inside": The Questionnaire

In order to define the brand identity "from the inside", the research has defined a questionnaire through which to get, in a participatory and inclusive way, the values and the fundamental statements of the brand by "internal" users.

For the construction of the questionnaire three models were used as reference: the "project/manifestations" model of semiotic approach to brand [1], which was useful to articulate the entire research in two fundamental phases related to the "brand identity" (expressed from the inside) and to the "brand image" (perceived from the outside); the model of Aaker & Joachimsthaler, also called "of the four connotations" of the brand [2], useful for identifying the connotations of the brand; the "prism of identity" of the six elements of brand [3], whose concepts have been used later to build and articulate the questions.

Two basic moments were thus identified, with respect to which to articulate the formulation of questions: a first moment of "descriptive" kind as well as a later stage of "interpretation" kind. At the first stage (descriptive) belong the questions useful to identify the key features of the brand. In particular:

- the "role" and the *raison d'etre* of the brand;
- the "ultimate promise" that the brand proposes to fulfill its role;
- the "specification of promise" and its characters of originality;
- the identification of the main products and services provided.

To the second stage (interpretation), however, belong the identification of the values-oriented questions of identity. For this purpose, starting from the model of Aaker & Joachimsthaler, were considered the results of a subsequent research [4] that had further broken down the four "connotations" in six "dimensions" as well as, for each of them, in a pair of "characteristics "in which can be articulated and composed a brand identity:

1. brand as a product: the brand identity is characterized by the attributes of both its individual products/services and the whole range of supply;
2. brand as a function: brand identity is characterized by both practical and functional benefits that the "customers" receive, and the attitude with which the brand offers its services.
3. brand as an organization: the identity of the brand is characterized by both the institutional structure to which it refers to, and to the territorial dimension in which it operates.
4. brand as a person: the identity of the brand is characterized by its personality, the way it interacts with the "clients" and, in the specific case study of an institution like the University, it was decided to add also a third characteristic concerning the "name".
5. brand as a symbol: the brand identity is characterized both by its metaphors and/or iconography, and by its heritage and tradition.
6. brand as a benefit: the identity of the brand is characterized by both the benefits of self-expression of clients, and from the emotional benefits of them when they relate with the brand.

For each of the six dimensions were therefore identified two questions (three for the "person" dimension), one for each characteristic.

To the first thirteen questions of the "interpretive" stage that orient to a reflection on the current state of the brand identity, thirteen more questions have joined, useful for gathering thoughts on a possible and desirable evolution of the brand in the following years. All survey questions were formulated in order to get very synthetic answers (an adjective, a noun, etc.): This synthesis is required for the subsequent reprocessing of the data. One last question, concerning the identification, among all the short answers previously given, of a selection of the best "words" useful to "represent" the brand, also allows to identify the "features" more representative among the values and concepts expressed by the interviewed.

3.2   The Identity "from the Outside" the Communicativeness of the Manifestations of the Brand

In order to analyze the brand identity "from the outside" through the "perception" of external users, whether direct or indirect, we resort to the basic principle that characterizes the previous "project / manifestations" model [1]. The idea is that it is possible to verify the consistency of the "manifestations", that are the perceived "brand im-
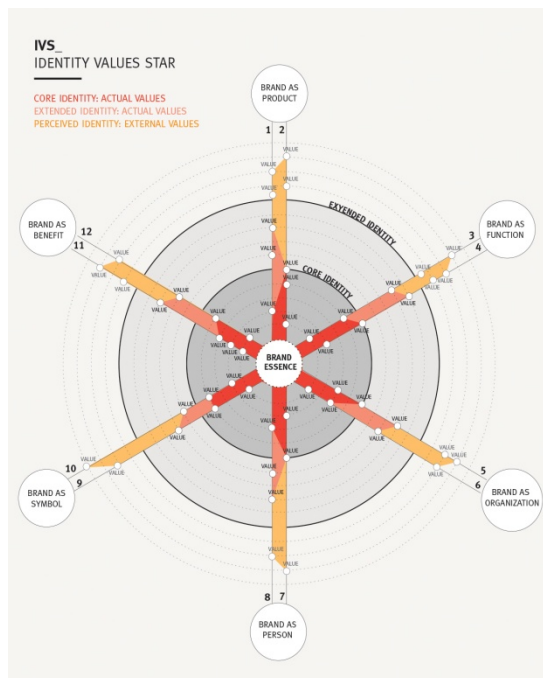
age", through the values and concepts of the "brand identity": that is, the whole system of elements and artifacts of communication through which the brand "expresses itself": the logo, the name, packaging, architecture, merchandising, literature, communications, and so on. For this purpose, it has developed a form of analysis of the individual manifestations of the the brand, which, starting from the system of identity obtained through the questionnaire, relates concepts and values with the "visual" characteristics of "manifestations", in order to identify elements of coherence and points of contradiction.

4   Results

The research, still being carried out, has obtained its first results through the definition and development of some initial analysis as well as visual communication toolkits for the brand identities:

— The IVS: Identity Values Star
— The SAB: Sign Analysis Board

4.1   The IVS Tool (Identity Values Star)

The IVS (Identity Values Star) graphically represents the set of identity values and concepts emerged through the questionnaire. It is organized on the basis of the six "dimensions" of the brand identity, and in each direction the "values" are placed in a

"weighted" way: the values that identify the most of the essence, the "bottom prom-
ise" and the mission of the brand are placed closer to the "center" of the star (core
identity), while those additional attributes that do not fall within the central "core"
identity, but which specify better the identity meaning are projected outward (identity
extended).

4.2   The SAB Tool (Sign Analysis Board)

Each SAB (Sign Analysis Board) analyzes a single visual brand "manifestation", and
is divided into two parts: the lower part contains the "actual" values and the "desired"
values obtained from the processing of answers to the questionnaire on the brand
identity.

The upper part, however, allows you to enter those values that, while "external" to
the identity of the brand, emerge from a visual analysis of the analyzed "sign". The
board allows you to:

- identify the degree of correlation between each manifestation and the individual
  identity values, both actual and desired;
- isolate those values "external" to the brand identity that are contained and commu-
  nicated through the visual element ("sign/manifestation") analyzed.

The SAB, therefore, provides useful information on the strengths and weaknesses of
the visual communication of the brand identity, both overall and with respect to the
single elements.

5   Conclusions

The research, which is still under experimental verification, is a first attempt to relate to each other brand identity and brand visual communication elements, through the creation of toolkits of analysis and objective and concrete verification.

In particular, the research has defined a first set of tools useful for the designer to identify, in a participatory manner and according to the inclusive criteria of Design for All, the values of a brand identity, as well a second set of tools useful to analyze, in an objective and comprehensive way, the communicativeness aspects of the current "visual manifestations" of the brand identity.

The research will be completed in the later stages taking into account the difficulties and capabilities expressed by the multi-user interaction with the elements of visual communication: This is based on the idea that differences between individuals can be a resource for the project rather than a constraint.

Credits. This paper refers to the results achieved from a research activity carried out by the authors on the themes of (visual) Brand Identity and Design for All. So, while the various paragraphs are the consequence of a common discussion among authors, their writing can be attributed to: Stefania Camplone (1 and 2), Giuseppe Di Bucchianico (3) and Stefano Picciani (4 and 5).

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