Brand Experience Proposition: Bridging Branding and Service Design

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Brands exist at the intersection between the meaning proposition made by the organization, and customer's perceptions. For the company, the brand is a proposition, a promise of a future experience; for the customer, the brand is the outcome of their experiences with the brand touchpoints. Brand and Customer Experience are therefore essentially connected.

In that context, Service Design may provide the means to support the development of the interactions through which the customers experience the brand. Conversely, Service Design can also profit from branding's link to the business strategy. Yet, a gap between Service Design and Branding literature and practice persists. This paper argues for a stronger link between Service Design and Branding, focusing on the means to use of the brand as a guide in the design process.

By exploring the relation between Service Design and Branding, this paper introduces the concept of Brand Experience Proposition. Next, a systematic literature review highlights the gap between the disciples. Two case studies presenting the development and utilization of Brand Experience Proposition in Service Design follows, further supporting the concept. Finally, key activities for bridging the gap between the Brand and the Customer Experience are discussed.

Keywords*: Service Design, Branding, Customer Experience, Brand Experience Proposition*

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Introduction

With the growing role of the customer experience for business competitiveness, Service Design has gained prominence as a discipline that can help organizations improve the interactions through which the customers experience their brand. However, even though the link between Service Design and Branding seems rather obvious, academic research at the intersection of the topics is still scant. In practice, the situation is not very different; a study from Forrester Research reports that only 18% of the surveyed organizations ground their customer experience strategy on the brand, suggesting a gap between the functions responsible for managing the brand, and those responsible for developing the service interactions that deliver the brand promise to the customers (Munchbach, 2014).

Brands emerge in the negotiations between the organisations' value propositions, which are manifested through the offerings, and the customers' perceptions resulting from these interactions. In order to deliver their benefit, brands "need to work in conjunction with other material assets" (Kapferer, 2011, p.10), that is, they must be manifested through the service interactions. In that sense, Service Design can help translate the conceptual brand proposition into concrete actions that convey the brand to the customers (Karjalainen, 2004; Clatworthy, 2012). Analogously, Service Design can benefit from Branding's strategic intent. Simply improving the customer experiences is not enough. Service Design must ensure that the service interactions are aligned with the business strategy (Mager, 2009).

In this paper, brands are defended as natural candidates for informing the experience the organization aims at delivering (Motta-Filho, 2012; Roto, Nieminen, Lu, & Tutal, 2015). As Carbone and Haeckel (1994, p.9) note, "engineering an experience begins with the deliberate setting of a targeted customer perception". Being the reflex of "the customers' preferences, the company's heritage, and the internal competencies" (Motta-Filho, 2017, p.11), the brand can inform the customer value proposition (Payne, Frow, & Eggert, 2017), helping to bridge Service Design and business strategy.

In the next section, the link between Customer Experience and Branding is further explored, justifying the brand as the foundation for the Experience Proposition – i.e. Brand Experience Proposition. Next, a literature review at the intersection of Service Design and Branding is presented, followed by two cases demonstrating the development of a Brand Experience Proposition. Key activities for bridging Service Design and Branding are then discussed, and finally, the last section reflects on the theoretical and practical consequences of a brand-oriented Service Design process, proposing topics for future research.

Customer Experience, Branding and the Brand Experience Proposition

The link between Service Design and Branding can be explained by the role customer experiences have for the brand. Service Design – as a designerly approach to service development (Segelström, 2013) – has only emerged relatively recently (Manzini, 2009) at the same point when the discussion about the importance of customer experience for the success of business were thriving (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Shaw & Ivens, 2002). Being inherently customer and user centric (Wetter-Edman, 2011), Service Design has attracted attention for its ability to improve the company's offerings, focusing on the processes and interfaces that enable the service provision.

Service Design facilitates the development of coordinated customer experiences (Clatworthy, 2011) by providing a pragmatic, co-creative and practical approach that balances technology, user and business needs (Stickdorn, Hormess, Lawrence, & Schneider, 2018), fostering collaboration amongst different stakeholders, and integrating multiple organizational silos (Kimbell, 2009) into the design process. The ability to conceive orchestrated customer experiences is one of the main characteristics of the discipline. Yet, it is important to notice that Service Design does not design the customer experience, but the enablers of these experiences.

As a phenomenological response to the service interactions (Helkkula, 2011), the customer experience cannot be designed in itself (Zomerdijk & Voss, 2011), but only through the settings that influence their perception (Patrício, Fisk, & Constantine, 2011). This also means that regardless of intention or active interference from the organization, there always is an experience for the customer, as any sort of interaction will influence their perception (Johnston & Kong, 2011). Therefore, if the organization is to strategically manage the customers' experiences, it must systematically design and implement the functional and emotional clues that influence the customers' perceptions of the service (Berry, Carbone, & Haeckel, 2002; Berry, Wall, & Carbone, 2006).

Another consequence is that since brands emerge in their interactions with the customers, whether explicitly or not, whether well managed or not (Ostrum, Iacobucci, & Morgan, 1995), the branding process is always taking place. For the customers, the brand is the outcome of their experiences with the organization, and can be represented as a mental network of meanings linked to the brand name as result of their relationship with the organization (Aaker, 1991).

From the organization's perspective, the brand is a conceptual meaning proposition (Batey, 2008): "a cluster of functional and emotional values that enable a promise to be made about a unique and welcomed experience"

(Chernatony, 2010, p. 17), which is mediated to the customer by any sort of manifestations (Semprini, 2006). Any direct (e.g. good or service) or indirect (e.g. word of mouth) contact with the brand will influence the customers' perceptions.

Brands are thus conceptualized as meaning propositions that ultimately live in the customers' minds as the outcome of their interactions with the brand manifestations. Because brand value is grounded on the customers' perceptions (Keller, 2013) – and the power these perceptions have to influence the customer's attitudes (Kapferer, 2011) – the mediating role of the service interactions is paramount, for it is through the experiences with these touchpoints that the customer will attribute meanings, and therefore value, to the brand (Berry, 2000). The link between Brand and Customer Experience is hence very clear: for the brand, experiences mediate their proposition to the customer; for the customer, the experience shaped their perception of the brand.

Carbone and Haeckel (1994, p.9) suggest that the first step in managing the customer experience is to define a "targeted customer perception". In that sense, the brand can help differentiate the experience the organization aims at delivering to the customer – their Brand Experience Proposition (Motta-Filho, 2012; Roto et al., 2015). Because the brand value is a reflex of previous experiences, it conveys how prized the relationship is to the customers (Keller, 2013), creating a connection to the company's heritage (i.e. what has been done in the past).

Moreover, the brand also informs strategic decisions made by the organization: first, by the presented brand – the "company's controlled communication of its identity and purpose through its advertising, service facilities, and the appearance of service providers" (Berry, 2000, p.129); and second, through the allocation of resources, and the influence these choices have on the service interactions (i.e. the integration of operant resources that support the value proposition; Skålén, Gummerus, von Koskull, & Magnusson, 2015).

The brand can thus link the customer value proposition (Payne et al., 2017) with relationships that are valued by the customers, the company heritage, and the internal capacities of the organization. Furthermore, since brands are often associated with the business strategy (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000), a Brand Experience Proposition can inform the Service Design process in the development of new service offerings that are not only desirable and feasible, but also viable (Brown & Katz, 2009).

Using a Brand Experience Proposition to inform the Service Design process can facilitate the development of brand-aligned offerings, and also support the advancement of a customer experience-oriented approach to

branding. Finally, it is important to notice that Brand Experience Proposition differs from Customer Experience Proposition in its experience object: while the latter stems from the value that *services* provide to the customer, the Brand Experience Proposition defines the desired experience of the *brand* itself for the customer.

The Literature Gap at the Intersection of Service Design and Branding

A systematic literature review was conducted to explore literature in the intersection of service design and branding. In specific, the review aimed to identify publications that studied how to design services that strengthen the brand. In other words, this research looked for studies where the existing Brand Identity guided Service Design, or Service Design was a part of Branding activities. Scopus was selected as the literature database due to its broader coverage of service design literature. The systematic review consisted of four publication filtering phases: (1) Scopus keyword search, (2) Length and keyword compliance check, (3) Abstract check, and (4) Whole article check. The final searches were executed in March 2018.

In the first literature review phase, three separate searches were done focusing on the publications that listed both Brand and either Service Design, Service Development, or Service Innovation in the list of keywords. The search covered publications from all fields with no time limitations. The oldest publications in the search results originated from year 2009. Filtering phase 2 included removal of duplicates and publications that were less than 3 pages long or did not contain the required keywords. In phase 3, filtering was done by the relevance of the abstract. In this phase, only the publications focusing on the means of *using Brand as a guide in Service Design or vice versa* were selected for further analysis.

The excluded publications were, for example, testing if services affect brand image, brand loyalty, or brand equity; investigating the factors affecting service loyalty; and designing for service and brand separately. Phase 4 included studying the full articles, again filtering out publications that did not use Brand as a kind of guide in Service Design, or Service Design as the means in Branding. Four of the studied publications did not investigate *Service* Design, one studied an experience room of branded products, and one highlighted the importance of brand in experience design in general. Table 1 depicts the results as numbers of publications in each separate search after the different phases of search and analysis.

Table 1   The phases of the systematic literature review and the number of publications after each phase.

Keywords: Phase:	Brand AND "Service Design"	Brand AND "Service Development"	Brand AND "Service Innovation"	Total
1. Keyword search	13	3	7	23
2. Keywords, Length, Duplicates	8	2	6	16
3. Abstract	6	1	1	8
4. Whole text	0	1	0	1

The result of this systematic literature review yielded to a single scientific publication that addressed the intersection of Service Design and Branding, specifically from the perspective of integrating branding in developing services (Clatworthy 2012). In his paper, Clatworthy (2012) takes the semantic transformation concept used in product branding (Karjalainen 2004) as the basis for developing a three-stage process that aims at transforming Brand Strategy into Service Experiences. The process starts by clarifying and summarizing the brand DNA, i.e., describing the essence of the brand. The second stage of the process focuses on developing service personality and the intended touchpoint behaviours. The third stage enacts and refines the service experiences by prototyping the experiences before implementing them in the new service touchpoints.

In summary, using the rather hard filtering criteria of the key concepts Brand and Service Design/Development/Innovation listed as author keywords, 23 publications were located in Scopus database. Most of the publications in the intersection of Service Design and Branding studied the influence of service experiences on brand perception (e.g., Xu et al. 2014), the influence of brand on service experience (e.g., Kiumarsi et al. 2015), or investigated the two concepts without bringing them together in design (e.g., Yin et al. 2014). Based on this admittedly limited literature review, only Clatworthy (2012) provides guidance on linking Branding and Service Design, and was also the most cited publication among those fulfilling the search criteria.

Developing a Brand Experience Proposition

This chapter describes two independently conducted case studies, which used brands as a guide in Service Design. The first case study aimed at developing a Brand Experience Manual to inform Service Design projects. The second case study utilized a co-design approach to first crystallize the

brand experience goals for the case company, and then used those goals as guides in collaborative service improvement.

Building a Brand Experience Manual - Bridging Brand Strategy and New Service Development

As part of a greater research initiative, a project investigating 'how to use service design to translate brand strategy into customer experiences' explored ways to inform the New Service Development (NSD) teams what experience they should design for. Building on the Semantic Transformation concept (Karjalainen, 2004), it was understood that since the "qualitative brand descriptions are transformed into value-based design features" (Karjalainen & Snelders, 2010, p.8) during the NSD process (Clatworthy, 2012), these design teams need adequate brand input. However, research indicated that the contemporary brand manuals were ill-suited for the development of service experiences (Motta-Filho, 2012).

 In that context, a research by design approach (Sevaldson, 2010) was taken to support the development of a tool meant to convey the experience the brand aims at delivering. Over the course of four iterations, a framework for defining and communicating the Brand Experience Proposition was developed through cycles of design interventions (action) and reflection (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). The following case briefly describes the last iteration, where a functional Brand Experience Manual was created for the partner organization; a mid-sized telecom brand in Northern Europe.

Brandslation: Defining the Brand Experience Proposition

The process for translating the Brand Strategy into the Brand Experience Proposition has been named Brandslation. Structured as a Service Design method, the Brandslation process is divided into two main phases – both collaborative and transdisciplinary (Dunin-Woyseth & Nilsson, 2011), involving stakeholders from different silos, from within and beyond the organization, going through cycles of exploration and generation.

At the first stage, the process focused on gathering material that could help to inform the development of the Brand Experience Proposition. Insights about the brand perception, service experience, internal capabilities, customers' context, and brand and business strategy are explored from the perspective of the three key stakeholders: customers, employees and organization (represented by the management team). This was executed over a series 4 workshops, where the different types of insights were paired with the most appropriate stakeholders (table 2).

Table 2   Distribution of type-of-insights/stakeholders over the workshops

Stakeholder / Type of Insight:	Customer	Employee	Organization
1. Brand Perception	Workshop A1 & A2	Workshop A3	
2. Service Experience	Workshop A1 & A2	Workshop A3	
3. Internal Capabilities		Workshop A3	Workshop A4
4. Customers' context	Workshop A1 & A2	Workshop A3	Workshop A4 [-]
5. Brand and Business Strategy			Workshop A4

In order to maximize the relevance of the insights from the customers' workshops, one focused on older customers and on their brand relationship and perceptions, and the other with newer customers and the experience of becoming a client; yet, both sessions enquired about the brand and service experience. Additionally, the sessions with customers, as well as the one with employees (Workshop A3), were also concerned with understanding the customers' context: their needs, anxieties, motivations and desires.

Yet, the main goal of the sessions with the employees was to understand their experience, and the main issues hindering the delivery of what they believe to be an adequate experience. Also, because the frontline personnel have first-hand experience with the customers, they were asked to share their impressions on the customers' context. Finally, it was also relevant to see how the employees perceive the brand – alignment between brand and organizational culture may foster brand-based interactions (Ind, 2007; Stompff, 2008).

The last workshop from the first stage focused on understanding the Brand and Business Strategies. Insights into the customer context and brand identity were also reviewed prior to the session through marketing material (i.e. research and manuals), informing the session. Brand positioning played an important role, especially because the brand was part of a much bigger organization with two other bigger brands in the same segment (telecom).

Table 3   Second phase workshops – Co-designing the Brand Experience Proposition

Workshop B1	Workshop B2	Workshop B3	Workshop B4
Co-design the Relationship Metaphor with key stakeholder from the organization	Review the Relationship Metaphor with the help of customers	Bridge the gap between the current and the desired experience with the help of the organization	Review previous material and star with the Service Moments together with the organization

All the information and insights gathered in the previous workshops were organized and then condensed into a visual report that could be used to inform the first workshop of the second phase (table 3; Workshop B1). During this session a metaphor for the relationship the brand wants to foster with the customers was created. First, a brand character was defined; then, this character was described in relation to a predefined customer persona, helping to detail its personality traits, the nature of the relationship between the brand character and the customer persona, and their history.

This Relationship Metaphor was later refined with the help of customers (Workshop B2), and then the current journey and the ideal journey – in the context of the Relationship Metaphor – were bridged by addressing the recurring gaps in the customer experience. This resulted in the development of Design Principles (more detail on the next section) – yet, due to the complexity of the task, parts of this process had to be taken after the workshop.

In the last workshop (B4) the Design Principles were then reviewed and adjusted. Next, a narrative telling the ideal customer journey began to be visualized – the Service Moments. This was again further developed after the session with feedback from the organization. From this process, three videos were developed as a way to create a proxy for the experience the brand wanted to deliver to its customers. After the Brandslation process was concluded, the Brand Experience Proposition was structured in a Brand Experience Manual, which is described in the next section.

Brand Experience Manual: Communicating the Brand Experience Proposition

The Brandslation process and the Brand Experience Manual cannot be separated; the first is structured in a way that it informs the development of the second – they are essentially two faces of a coin. The Brand Experience Manual is composed of the three essential products of the Brandslation process: the Relationship Metaphor, the Design Principles, and the Service Moments. The idea is to convey the Band Experience Proposition through the combination of these parts.

The Relationship Metaphor is a description of how the experience should be – it should define the brand as a character in a relationship with a customer persona. Because brands emerge from the relationship between the customers' perceptions and the company's propositions, which are mediated by the interactions with the branded offerings, in designing for the Relationship Metaphor, the design teams are actually creating the settings for delivering the Brand Experience Proposition.

The Design Principles are prescriptive tools – they inform the design teams of what must be done to deliver the Brand Experience Proposition. In some cases, the Design Principles may appear generic, however, they should represent the most relevant issues hindering the delivery of the desired experiences. The idea is that adherence to these principles in the design process ensures that the key aspects of the Brand Experience Proposition are addressed.

Finally, the Service Moments are narratives that serve as proxies for the Brand Experience Proposition; they are meant to create an "impression of the desired experience", making the audience feel how the brand desires the customers to feel. Also, the frame of the Service Moments is different to the traditional customers' journeys, as it is broken down into "quests"; for example, getting to know the company, or changing the subscription. These could be done in multiple ways, through different channels and touchpoints, yet, the focus is on the customer moment answering to its mission.

Evaluation and Reflection

The Brand Experience Manual, and the process for developing it, was later evaluated through a series of semi-structured interviews with experts in the field, and despite minor disagreements, it was considered to be a useful and usable tool to inform the Brand Experience Proposition to the design teams. In terms of limitations, the main issue was not within the confines of the Brand Experience Manual, but in its implementation. In follow-up interviews it was noticed that the organization had difficulties in translation of the *Brand Experience Proposition* into service interactions. However, a closer look revealed that the problem was not the Brand Experience Manual itself, but the lack of organizational capabilities in the field of Service Design.

In that sense, it is important to observe that a Brand Experience Manual alone will not do much; the organization must not only have the will, but also the capability to implement the Brand Experience Proposition in order to reap the benefits.

Strengthening Intended Brand Experience in Service Touchpoints

The case reported above advances the first two stages of Clatworthy's (2012) process by defining a Brand Experience Proposition for a company via Relationship Metaphor and Brand Experience Manual. The second case, described in this section, developed *Brand Experience Goals* as conceptual guides for strengthening the brand in service touchpoints. A Brand Experience Goal captures the key desired characteristics of the organization

in the form of a few adjectives, such as *professional*, *easily approachable*, or *cooperative*. Brand Experience Goals can state characteristics that the organization already is known of, or characteristics that the organization sees a feasible goal, given the company identity and culture. While these goals are stating the intended customer experience in a simpler format than a typical proposition statement, they serve the same purpose as Brand Experience Propositions in Service Design, and help bridging the gap between Branding and Service Design as shown in this section.

The objective of this case study was to crystallize the brand in a collaborative manner and to help the employees strengthen the intended brand experiences in their daily work in service touchpoints. In this paper, we briefly explain the Brand Experience Goal setting phase, but focus on the phase in which service providers collaboratively designed means to improve service experiences in touchpoints.

The *Brand New* research programme (2015-2017) aimed at enhancing competitiveness of partner companies, for instance, by improving their corporate image in service touchpoints. One of the partners of the *Brand New* research programme was a medium-sized property maintenance and real estate management company, with whom the researchers studied collaborative means for setting Brand Experience Goals and applying them in service touchpoints. In the first phase of the research, the researchers investigated how the staff and customers described this company at the present point and how they would like it to be in the future. The current and desired characteristics were analysed and categorized. In the second phase, 20 employee and management representatives from different parts of the organization were invited to a co-design workshop to collaboratively define the Brand Experience Goals. The characteristics mentioned frequently as current or desired characteristics in the background studies served as the input material for selecting Brand Experience Goals, and teams of 4 participants discussed and prioritized the characteristics and the Brand Experience Goals were chosen in a plenary session through voting and discussion.

The purpose of the above activities was similar to the first stage in Karjalainen's (2004) and Clatworthy's (2012) processes: to clarify the brand identity. However, in this case, the brand identity was not only communicated to the stakeholders, but the participants in the co-design workshop defined the brand based on the organizational identity studies and their own and shared values. The outcome is not only leaning to the past but also to the future - the company wanted both to clarify their brand personality and to improve the brand experiences. Thus, the outcome is not brand DNA but Brand Experience Goals.

After the first stage of the process, another half-a-day co-design workshop was organized to embed the agreed Brand Experience Goals into service touchpoints. This process was different from the 2nd stage of Clatworthy's (2012) model, as collaborative design was used to plan service improvement touchpoint by touchpoint. In the workshop, 20 employee and management representatives ideated means to implement the Brand Experience Goals in practice.

Before the workshop, participants were asked to list the touchpoints in their work where brand experiences form. In the workshop, five groups were formed of four people working in similar touchpoints, such as customer service, maintenance, or digital services. Each group was provided a set of relevant touchpoints cards, consisting of selected AT-ONE cards (Clatworthy 2011) and the touchpoints reported by the participants. In addition, the groups were asked to think through a customer journey related to their service and add possible missing touchpoints on empty cards. Once the touchpoint cards were ready, the first ideation round started. Each participant was asked to work alone for 10 minutes following the instructions below:

1. Take a touchpoint and a Brand Experience Goal.
2. Think how You yourself would realize the given goal in the given touchpoint in the best possible, even exaggerated, manner. Write the idea on a post-it note.
3. Repeat steps 1 and 2. The number of ideas is more important than quality.

After the time was up, the created ideas were shared within the small group. The instruction was to provide 5 minutes for each team member for presenting one's own ideas, and the group members to refrain from criticism. Once everyone had presented their ideas, the group was asked to develop ideas that follow the spirit of the Brand Experience Goals. The target was to report at least one idea for all touchpoints (Figure 1).

Figure 1   Collaborative ideation addressing Brand Experience Goals in a service touchpoint.

The next phase, following a break, was based on the World Café idea (Brown 2005): except of a chosen host of the group's table, the group members visited the other tables for 10 minutes each. The host presented the primary group work results to the visitors, who could comment and add new ideas. After visiting all tables, the groups returned to their home table to see how the other groups had contributed to their original ideas.

The final phase of the small group work was to choose an exciting idea, refine it further, and report it on paper in a given 'From idea to reality' template. The groups had 45 minutes to work on as many ideas as possible. The purpose was to define concrete actions for improving the brand experience in a specific touchpoint, in order to maximize the workshop impact in one's own work and in company development activities. The workshop ended with presentations of the 'From idea to reality' plans, a plenary discussion on how to get the plans implemented, and filling in a feedback form. After the workshop, the researchers collected the plans into one presentation and delivered it to the company management.

The second workshop was a quick but efficient exercise to find ways to meet the Brand Experience Goals in service touchpoints. Due to the fact that service employees themselves were describing the improved interactions in touchpoints, they were very familiar with the current interactions. The changes in the service were not dramatic in this case, therefore there was not a strong need for experience prototyping, the 3rd stage of the process proposed by Clatworthy (2012). Instead, the idea was that each participant

can go back to work and integrate the new ideas directly in their daily work as service providers.

This case targeted at branding service touchpoints on the level of daily practices of the service front line. The goal was not to innovate new services, and no professional branding or service designers were involved from the customer side. The key activity in proceeding from the intended brand image to services that strengthen such an image of the company was pairing a single Brand Experience Goal and a single service touchpoint and inventing concrete ways to convey the wanted brand experience in that touchpoint. Employees who work in the touchpoint were able to produce ideas relatively easily, and several participants expressed their surprise on the high number of produced ideas in the feedback form.

The final set of 'From idea to reality' plans contained 26 selected ideas, more than 5 per group. An earlier, similar but much shorter exercise (Roto et al. 2015) proved to be efficient in ideation as well. In addition to the collected set of plans, this kind of collaborative workshop empowers and motivates the participants to take the action and, hopefully, inspire their colleagues to do the same.

Delivering the Brand Experience Proposition

The previous section presented examples of the development of a Brand Experience Proposition, and how this concept may be used to bridge Branding and Service Design. In order to design for a service experience, the design teams must first know what experience they should aim at delivering. By making the desired customer experience of the brand explicit, the Brand Experience Proposition creates a shared language, facilitating the communication among the stakeholders involved into the development of the interactions through which the customers experience the brand. Since service brands have multiple touchpoints (Berry et. al., 2006), managing all customers' interactions can be challenging; defining and codifying the Brand Experience Proposition may support the alignment necessary to ensure brand consistency.

In relation to Clatworthy's (2012) Brand Megaphone model, the first case focused on the summarizing the "brand DNA" and developing a "service personality" stages, advancing the analogy used to convey the Brand Experience Proposition through a comprehensive research. The second case, although shorter in the definition of the Brand Experience Proposition, moved towards the development of the Service Concept – going beyond the "enactment and refinement" stage proposed by Clatworthy's model. What the combination of both cases brings anew, contributing to theory and

practice is a more detailed approach to the description and implementation of a Brand Experience Proposition.

As previously noticed, Service Design needs adequate input in terms of brand strategy. In that sense, a thorough exploration, precise definition, and clear communication of the Brand Experience Proposition is essential (i.e. the first case). Yet, the Brand Experience Proposition must be translated into service interactions in order for the customer to engage with it – until manifested through material actions the Brand Experience Proposition is just an idea. Creating a Brand Experience Proposition-grounded Service Concept is thus understood as the first step in a Service Design process aimed at delivering brand-based customer value proposition (Payne et al., 2017).

The Service Concept will define the '*what'* and the '*how'* of the service offering, informing the development of the settings that support the service provision (Edvardsson & Olsson, 1996). Although Service Design can mean something different in the context of traditional NSD methods (Goldstein, Johnston, Duffy, & Rao, 2002), this paper takes the view of Service Design as a user-centred and collaborative approach (Stickdorn et. al, 2018) that can support the conception of better service interactions (i.e. as done in the second case). In other words, by engaging multiple actors in co-creative practices, Service Design can enable the development of superior value propositions.

Once the Service Concept is defined, the processes, interfaces and systems that support the service interactions must be developed (Edvardsson & Olsson, 1996; Patrício et al., 2011). This link to the back end of the service innovation - which is better addressed by the Design for Service approach (Kimbell, 2011; Sangiorgi, 2012) - is essential to ensure the implementation of the service offering (Tatikonda & Zeithaml, 2002). Designing a service implies the *service* as the object of design - however, the service is only a platform for value co-creation, which is enabled by a dynamic configuration of resources (Maglio, Vargo, Caswell, & Spohrer, 2009).

Designing for Service (Kimbell, 2011; Sangiorgi, 2012), on the other hand, entails the recognition that what is being designed is not the service per se, but the enablers of the service experience. To ensure that the Brand Experience Proposition fulfils its potential, supporting the desired customer experience with the brand, Service Design practices must go beyond the co-creation of value proposition, to also focus on the translation of the (Brand Experience Proposition-based) Service Concept into the enablers of the service interactions. Branding can provide a link to business strategy, but without implementation, even the best Service Concept is of no value.

Conclusion

This paper argued for a stronger connection between Service Design and Branding, proposing the concept of Brand Experience Proposition as a link between the fields. Service Design's focus on the customer experience does not necessarily grant alignment with the organization's positioning; yet, the brand can provide a link to the customers' relationships, business strategy and organizational competencies, informing the development of customer value propositions (Payne et al., 2017) that are desirable, feasible and viable (Brown & Katz, 2009). Additionally, because brand value is grounded on the customers' perceptions, managing the service experiences is central to Branding practices. Service Design – and more specifically Design for Service – provides an approach that facilitates the development of superior service offerings.

Service Design and Branding can thus clearly benefit from one another. However, as the research presented in this paper shows, there is persistent a gap at the intersection of the disciplines. Although the systematic literature review reported in this paper is still limited, and in future work, a more comprehensive literature review should be conducted with additional search keywords and search engines, the results are very clear: the volume of research at the intersection of Branding and Service Design is very thin. Additionally, our own experience cooperating with several companies and discussions with other professionals have shown that the maturity level of Brand usage in Service Design in industry is still low. This suggests that more empirical and theoretical research is needed to find better ways to utilize brand as a guide in service design.

For practice, the implications emerging from this study are very clear: on one hand, Service Designers need to extend their understanding of the experience the brand wants the customers to have, and design *for* it. On the other hand, Branding specialists must acknowledge the role of the customer experience in delivering the brand (i.e. meanings; Batey, 2008), making the brand more accessible and usable to designers responsible for developing the interactions that convey the brand proposition to its users. For theory, implications include not only the need for more research at the intersection of Service Design and Branding, but also the necessity of further exploration on ways to bridge the Brand Experience Proposition and the development of brand-based service interactions.

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