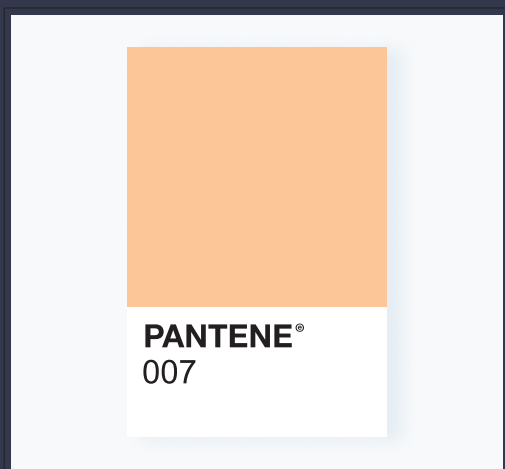


COLEÇÃO LIÇÕES DE ARTE & DESIGN

Vol. 5

EMÍLIO TÁVORA VILAR

**WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU GET?
THE IMAGE AND VISUAL IDENTITY**



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Volume 5
WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT
YOU GET?
THE IMAGE AND VISUAL IDENTITY

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“Image is a reality. It is the result of our actions. If the image is false and our performance is good, it’s our fault for being bad communicators. If the image is true and reflects our bad performance, it’s our fault for being bad managers”.

David Bernstein, *Company Image and Reality: A Critique of Corporate Communications*.

SUMMARY

In a marketing context, the importance of the image comes from its power to affect attitudes, which, in turn, influence behaviour. The importance of the image lies in the assumption that people's response towards products, brands or organizations is highly correlated with their image. This happens because people's decisions are often based on a mentally constructed reality — an image —, affected by their beliefs, feelings, and expectations. The image of a brand, for instance, is a key contributor to its value: the image determines pricing, distribution, and promotion policies, besides increasing the probability of choice and being associated with greater loyalty. In the service sector, the image is recognized as a determinant factor for global evaluation and constitutes a reliable indicator of success: the image influences the perception of the quality of the service provision, has an impact on satisfaction and loyalty, and facilitates choice when distinguishing based on other attributes is difficult.

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An image is a mental representation of a network of associations. Every image is personal and subjective, simplifying, selective and stable. It expresses our knowledge and attitude towards a given subject and allows us to assign meaning to it. Images are created, developed, and changed according to observation or experience or through stimuli from communication actions. The network of associations is also hierarchical: the image's degree of elaboration may vary from simple recognition or global assessment to elaborate judgments, resulting from the weighting of relevant attributes, and benefits. These may be concrete or abstract and of various relative strengths, depending on the importance attributed to each one and the type of relationships established between them.

Among the many meanings that 'image' can acquire, marketing focuses on the external view of the concept — image as the result of the perception of something. According to this perspective, the image 'belongs' to the public. That is to say that the image is not necessarily what its subject intends it to be. The image is what the public believes or feels about a given

subject and is founded on their observation and experience, on what the subject shows or says and on what others say about it. This implies acknowledging that images are always valid, even though they could be based on erroneous or imprecise beliefs. A 'bad' image, although unwanted, always proves to be a valuable input: it either reveals a performance problem or, this not being the case, a communication fault.

While recognising that it is not possible to directly intervene in the image — since it is the audience's prerogative —, it is however possible to act on the elements that determine the image. And, since an entity's external image depends mainly on factors related to its performance and communication actions, interventions are to be carried out on its products, services, and brands, on its spaces and equipment, and its communication and information systems. Together, they define the entity's visual identity.

The visual identity configures the physical representation of a brand or organisation. That implies acknowledging that all visible and projectable elements (products, facilities, clothing, communications) contribute to the brand or organisation's image. By acting on these elements, the goal of a visual identity program is thus to make the brand or organisation's intended positioning perceptible and valued by its public.

There are three conventional alternative approaches to visual identity relating to branding: 1) 'monolithic', where all products and services, regardless of their nature, share the same brand and visual style; 2) individual branding, when businesses opt to operate through a series of autonomous brands, each with its own visual identity; 3) 'endorsed' when there is an association between the parent brand and subsidiary brands.

At the core of visual identity lies the identifier — essentially the name, logo, and colour scheme. The identifier assumes a central role in the image formation process. It must combine fundamental qualities such as consistency, stability, and continuity, with contemporary requirements: flexibility, immediacy, and universality. The identifier's primary function is to ensure an unambiguous recognition of the entity it represents and an automatic recall of its nature and purpose. In addition, the identifier may acquire an instrumental role when used to visually express an entity's strategic options and intended changes.

1

WHY IS THE IMAGE IMPORTANT?

Images are powerful instruments. Images determine the way we perceive things, and our perception of things affects the way we relate to them.

The image is an important global assessment factor and is often recognized as an indicator of success. It influences the perception of quality, and, by contributing to the formation of expectations, it also affects perceived satisfaction. The image allows for differentiation, making choice easier; it simplifies the decision process, assists in the interpretation, processing, and retrieval of information, and can stimulate positive feelings and attitudes. Because of all this, the notion that the value of a product or brand largely depends on its image is today largely consensual.

In marketing, the importance of the image comes from the belief that images influence behaviour. Attitudes and actions towards products or brands are thought to be correlated with their image, assuming that a positive image will correspond to a favourable predisposition, a greater probability of choice and, possibly, greater loyalty. This happens because decisions are based on a mentally constructed reality — an image —, composed of beliefs and feelings, and abstracted in a set of simplifications.

Those exclusively dedicated to managing ‘reality’, focusing only on their performance, naively believe that what is done or said will always find a direct and exact correspondence to what others see or hear. But it just doesn’t work this way: communication doesn’t exist in a vacuum, immune to environmental ‘noise’ or oblivious to the activity of others, and it’s susceptible to each one’s perceptual idiosyncrasy. Therefore, the recognition of the inexistence of perfect communication processes and the limitations of ‘reality management’ led, at the beginning of the 1960s, to the emergence of a new business area: integrated image management.

Starting with a specific focus on the graphic elements of the identifier (logo, symbol) it has since expanded to comprise all the other ‘controllable’ aspects of businesses’ visual

communications. Meanwhile, its field of action has also widened: once concentrated exclusively on for-profit business organisations, image management has currently become an essential area in all public interacting types of organisations, from the public sector to NGOs or political parties.

Marketing differentiates three specific areas of image management: products/services, brands, and organisations. In the foreground, we may distinguish the image of the product class (e.g., news magazine) and the image of a particular brand (e.g., Time). At the organisational level, one can distinguish the image of the subsidiary company (e.g., Citibank) and the image of the holding company (e.g., Citigroup). In addition, we may also consider the image of the sector of activity (e.g., Banking) and even the country's image (e.g., the USA), which may have a direct or indirect influence on the image of products, brands, or organizations.

Today, several reasons explain the growing importance of image management: the need for differentiation, which is a product of growing competition; the shortening life cycle of products and services; greater segmentation; the increase in mergers, acquisitions and privatisations, the diversification and deregulation of markets; rising media costs and recognition of the value of integrated communications; internationalisation and globalisation.

2 SCOPE AND DEFINITION

What exactly are we referring to when we use the term ‘image’?

‘Image’ acquires different meanings depending on the context in which it is used. From the Latin ‘*imagine*’, the image may express an idea or concept, it could mean appearance or impression. Image may also be used to — inaccurately — suggest reputation, identity, perception, attitude, and credibility. In marketing terminology, the image refers to the generic idea that the public has of a product, service, brand, or organisation.

Still, regardless of the meaning given to it, an image is always a ‘representation’ — i.e., it presents something in its absence —, that expresses both concrete and abstract concepts and translates tangible as well as intangible things (e.g., a physical representation *vs.* a mental representation).

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The broad and arbitrary use of the term ‘image’ led to a breakdown of its content and some related scepticism. Image acquires a pejorative sense when it is understood as opposed to reality; while synonymous with imitation or appearance (i.e., form without substance) it usually means something artificial (implying some degree of falsehood) that superimposes or replaces an unfavourable reality. At the origin of this phenomenon lies the misconception about the possibility of a manifest and lasting separation between what an entity does and the way it is perceived (i.e., the ability to build and sustain an image separate from reality).

The dispute between the image as a ‘complete fabrication’ or, on the other hand, an ‘objective reality’, not yet fully resolved, implicitly reveals the mix-up that can be established between two possible approaches: image as a concept of emission, something in which one can intervene, manipulate and control — something emanated with deliberate intention — and, on the other hand, image as a concept of reception — the result of the perception of something.

The integration of both approaches in a single concept, covering actions and their effects, implies that the image materialises somewhere between stimulus and receiver and

mediates their interaction, i.e., that it defines the symbolic relationship between referent/object and the public. It also involves admitting that, although necessarily linked to its origin, the image may undergo changes (induced by marketing activities, context variables, and the characteristics of the recipients) that will not reflect its source.

From a marketing perspective, the concept of 'image' is relatively recent. Its formal introduction occurred in the mid-1950s when it was recognized that consumer attitudes towards products played an essential part in the outcome of the promotion and sale processes. For the first time, a separation between functional and symbolic factors was embraced, as well as the need to determine how products and brands are organised in the consumer's mind. The 'abstract reality' that people may buy products for a reason beyond their physical qualities or functional properties is thus framed.

Marketing literature emphasises the public's perspective on image, admitting, in a dialectical relationship, their decisive influence in the conceptualization of the transmitted stimuli: the image is what people believe, or feel, about a product, brand or organisation, based on their experience and observation, based on what they know about it, based on what the product, brand or organisation say about themselves and on what others say about them. This implies accepting that the image's validity is not called into question by the fact that it may be based on erroneous or inaccurate beliefs.

Nevertheless, despite recognizing the individuality of the perceptual processes in the formation of the image, the interest of marketing focuses mainly on its public (i.e., non-private) aspects and its shared (i.e., non-exclusive) components. In marketing, the most important thing is the 'average image', the associations, beliefs, and feelings shared within a target group. When an image is 'shared', it is assumed that the value system of the people sharing it will be related and, therefore, their behaviour (whether consciously or not) will reflect and reinforce these similarities.

As a synthesis of a referent's reality, and being able to exhibit different degrees of abstraction, the image can vary from minimal identification (simple recognition) to a deep knowledge of the referent's characteristics. At its most basic

level, the image is merely a general impression in the memory. Images at this level are diffuse, making it difficult to identify the attributes that influence them and allowing only the perception of the relative position of the product or brand to its competitors on a very limited number of dimensions. On the other hand, at a high level of elaboration, the image is a complex and hierarchically structured network of meanings stored in memory.

Image can thus be defined as a mental representation of a network of meaningful associations.

As a mental representation, the image is personal and subjective, simplistic, selective, and stable. An image is personal and subjective because it results from an interpretation that can be rational or emotional, thus not necessarily or exclusively inherent to the technical, functional, or physical aspects of any referent, and it is influenced by individual beliefs, values, expectations, and experiences. It is selective and simplifying because it reduces complex situations to their essential abstract meanings, that is, to symbols, and even, sometimes, to stereotypes. It is stable and resistant to change because it is only called into question by the systematic effect of actions contradicting it.

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As a network of associations, the image expresses the knowledge and attitudes related to a given referent. This network of associations is the outcome of the interaction of the set of factors (sensory, cognitive, and affective) that are linked in our memory and that allow us to assign meaning to something. Which set of associations determines the image? All the associations that, directly or indirectly, may define a particular subject: factual knowledge and opinions, physical and symbolic attributes, benefits and feelings, graphics, slogans, people, situations, events, sounds, smells — everything that comes to mind when confronted with a certain referent (e.g., a company) or with its representation (e.g., the company logo or its leader).

3 IMAGE FORMATION

Image formation is the process through which a set of stimuli (experiences) is recognized (selected), interpreted (given meaning) and organised (retained) in memory according to certain categories and structures. When stimulated, perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes linked to a particular referent (e.g., a brand) and accumulated in memory are retrieved to reconstruct the image associated with it.

Thus, in image formation, the perceptual, cognitive, and attitudinal processes are central to its understanding, as are information processing and operational processes of memory.

3.1. Perception

The image finds its origin in perception, defined in marketing as the process by which individuals select, organise, and interpret stimuli (e.g., information) to form a coherent and meaningful picture. The perceptual mechanism rules the relationships between individuals and the world around them. Perceptions can form the basis of attitudes and preferences towards products or brands.

According to the perceptual principle of selective attention, the recognition of stimuli depends primarily on their nature (e.g., the physical characteristics of the product) and on the contrast with the environment in which they are inserted, and also on two groups of factors: the conjunctural reasons (e.g., the tendency to perceive stimuli associated with necessary or desired things and to ignore stimuli irrelevant to those ends) and expectations, influenced by familiarity, previous experience or simple predisposition. The principle of selective attention reflects the tendency towards the recognition and active search for information that supports what is believed, that gives pleasure, with which we agree and ensures our convictions and decisions; this principle also postulates the denial and avoidance of stimuli that are not consistent with these aspects, that are threatening or that contradict what we believe in.

The attribution of meaning to received stimuli (i.e., their interpretation and understanding) depends on how they are categorised, integrated with existing knowledge, and organised. The categorization of a stimulus involves its classification and evaluation according to pre-existing concepts. Motivation (e.g., when the stimulus is seen as having utility for the satisfaction of a need) and knowledge (a greater ability to understand corresponds to a lower probability of misinterpretation) are determinants of the interpretation of stimuli. This is necessarily subjective and is based on what one expects to see in the light of previous experiences, on the number of plausible explanations found in our interests at the time of the perception and on the clarity of the stimulus itself.

When stimuli are ambiguous, their interpretation obeys the principle of selective distortion. That is, interpretation will support existing beliefs and ‘fit’ a certain mindset, adapting the information to personal viewpoints. Influences liable to distort objective stimuli interpretations include:

— The halo effect, occurs when the evaluation of something or someone is based on only a few of their characterising factors, and these extend to the whole set. This phenomenon translates as a ‘generic impression’ or ‘global attitude’.

— Stereotypes, a simplistic mental model very resistant to change, translate into an ‘excessive’ generalisation of superficial characteristics and minimise or ignore individual differences. Stereotypes generally correspond to few, widely shared ideas, and allow, involving little mental effort, to react quickly to certain stimuli. From a marketing perspective, stereotypes correspond to summary assessments (e.g., ‘insurance companies are all...’) with great impact on initial and subsequent reactions to new products, services, or brands. Stereotypes also serve an effective function by acting as emotional filters; their public sharing — ‘what everyone knows’ and ‘what everyone likes’ — emerges as a facilitator of choice, especially in situations of first decision and in the absence of previous experience. Understood as ‘simplistic judgments’, stereotypes prevent the recognition of complexities and variations, being generally the result of superficial knowledge, based on appearance or arising from ‘hearsay’.

Alongside the halo effect and stereotypes, objective perceptions are also influenced by first impressions, when

instant judgments are made based on incomplete evidence. First impressions often rely on pre-existing frames of reference and take on a disproportionate weight in the evaluation of brands or products and services due to the absence of prior knowledge or experience. First impressions' crucial importance comes from their tendency to be 'sticky' and to last.

3.2. Cognition

Following perception, cognition — the process through which people come to understand what they perceive — is the most important component in the formation of the image. We now move on to mental representations based on meaning, that is, representations that abstract the perceptual details that gave rise to them and that encode the meaning of the experience, retaining the important relationships between elements. Some cognitive units link referents and attributes (e.g., company x sells automobiles); others, called propositional representations, link subjects and predicates (e.g., product x is a biohazard).

According to this associative network idea, the memory consists of a series of nodes, representing concepts, and links, representing the associations between nodes. Thus, structurally, the image takes the form of a constellation of associations between the stimulus (e.g., a brand) and a variable number of discriminating attributes and predicates (Fig. 1).

From a marketing perspective, believing that the brand is at the core of these constellations implies admitting connections to other types of information existing in memory and the creation of associations beyond those directly related to it. The analysis of the set of associations (or image) proves to be useful in exploring the nature of knowledge about products or brands: knowing the image of a brand or organisation encompasses the identification of the various nodes that are related (e.g., attributes and others), the recognition of the links between them (i.e., the beliefs or propositions) and the evaluation of the strength of these links (Fig. 2).

Fig. 1

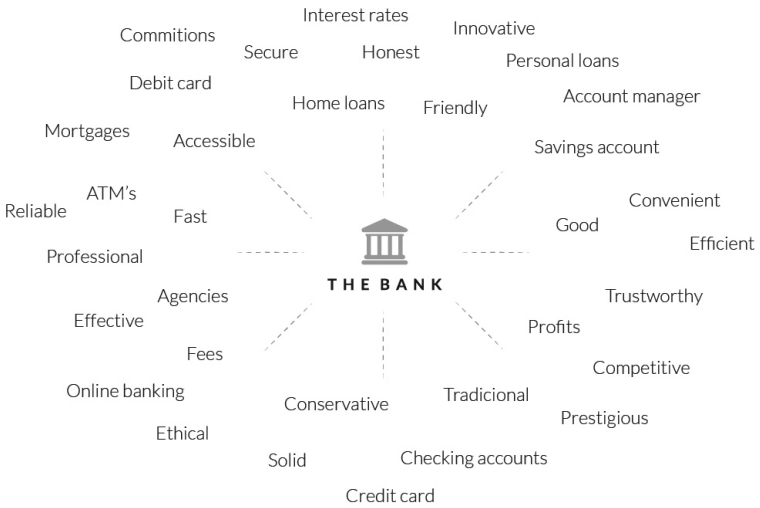
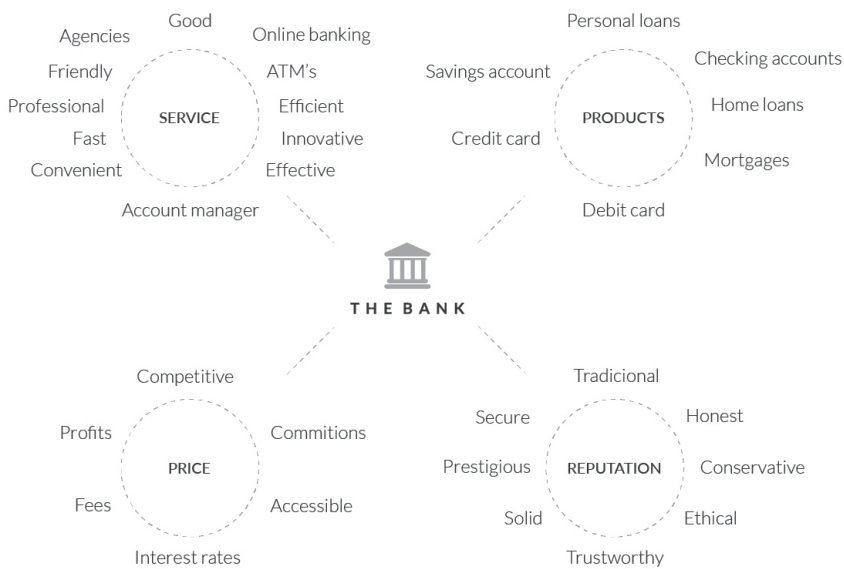


Fig. 2



'TheBank' is not just a set of random associations. Rather, the associations are organised into groups that have meaning. There might be a product cluster, a service cluster, a price cluster, or a reputation cluster. There could be one or more visual images that come to mind when the bank is mentioned, such as its logo, its app, its agency's appearance... Some associations are of a perceptual or cognitive nature, while others are attitudinal.

The knowledge structure that combines beliefs or propositions is called 'schemata'. This type of structure is understood as close to the concept of image endorsed by marketing (i.e., a network of associations), which leads to the assumption that each person has a schema — an image — for each organisation, product, or brand that he/she is familiar with. As representational structures of conceptual knowledge (of gradual complexity and abstraction), schemas are units, broader than simple cognitive units, that capture the inter-relational structure of the features of objects and events, that is, they represent the knowledge of how features come together to define objects and how events are linked to define episodes. Schemas imply the association of cognitive units concerning a given situation and may express hierarchical structures or simply translate groups created according to personal logic of relevance and similarity.

Schemas provide an inferential mechanism: when an object is recognized as a member of a certain category (e.g., 'TheBank' being a Bank), it can be inferred — unless explicitly contradicted — that it has the default values associated with the concept schema (e.g., the transferring of a feature generally associated with banking to a specific bank). Schemas, although rarely modified by simple messages, are by nature dynamic and permeable to change, information is constantly being organised and reorganised as new links between groups of data are made.

Self-schemas (i.e., the way one's characteristics are perceived) affect how information is processed and influence the way one sees, remembers, and evaluates others and oneself. The self-concept, particularly important for the study of consumer behaviour, is generally named self-image in marketing contexts. The image that each one has of themselves (type of person, particular traits, habits, relationships, possessions, and behaviour) is unique, draws

from their experience and develops through interaction and relationships with others over time. The image of products and brands is generally evaluated based on the existing congruence with people's image, and choices tend to preserve or reinforce this image. Designing a 'personality' for a brand or creating an image for its users is a well-known marketing communication strategy, based on the self-congruence models in brand positioning.

Finally, mental representations (images) cannot be dissociated from information processing. The importance attributed to knowledge representation stems from the fact that, in cognitive science, it is believed that the way information is represented affects the way it is processed. From a marketing perspective, the degree of integration of information in the existing conceptual system is relevant to the comparison between the communicational intentions of the source and the effects achieved: advertising campaigns, for example, generally have effects on the amplitude of cognitive processes (i.e., they contribute to the increase in the number of cognitive units associated in a given schema), but they rarely influence its depth (i.e., the quality of cognitive elaboration) — this effect is largely dependent on a proper referencing, that is, on the existence of a relationship between information and experience itself.

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3.3. Attitudes

To the concepts of perception and cognition, social psychology superimposes the concept of attitude, thus adding evaluation to the mental processes that form the image. An attitude is generally defined as the set of favourable or unfavourable evaluative reactions of someone regarding something. In simpler terms, an attitude translates the global appreciation resulting from the association between a referent and its evaluation. For marketing, attitudes are important because of the generally accepted notion that they work as indicators of behaviour.

Attitudes are determined by two components: 1) cognition, which includes awareness, understanding and knowledge, and is generally translated in the form of beliefs and 2) affectivity, which focuses on emotions and feelings, and

refers to taste, preference, expressed by global ratings in favourable/unfavourable terms. In turn, attitude becomes a determinant of a conative component, exerting a direct influence on intentions — the more favourable an attitude, the greater the intention to act — and an indirect influence on behaviour. The three components contribute to the general stability of attitudes — it is easier to change beliefs than feelings, and it is easier to change feelings than behaviours.

Another perspective reduces attitude to a global evaluation dimension (e.g., good/bad, like/dislike). According to this viewpoint, an attitude refers to generic assessments that do not require a prior cognitive appraisal, for example in situations where there is no interest or knowledge to weigh the merits of a product's attributes or to compare competing brands. Attitudes that assume global value judgments result from a sometimes-blurred boundary between cognitive and affective aspects (e.g., when we say 'fast food' are we stating an attribute [a belief] or expressing a [prejudice] judgment?).

4 IMAGE DETERMINANTS

Images are created, developed, and changed according to our observation or experience or because of external communication efforts. The extent and strength of the image — i.e., the network of associations — depends on the level of familiarity with the subject, on the information possessed, and on the interaction experiences one might have. The existence of a structured and coherent image implies recognising the specific network of associations that express its meaning and that we consider important.

4.1. Type of Associations

The type of associations depends on the degree of abstraction of the information synthesised and may be classified into two categories of increasing amplitude: attributes and benefits.

Attributes are the descriptive properties or characteristics that define the product or brand. Function-related attributes are those associated with performance. They are linked to the physical characteristics of the product or the service requirements. Attributes not directly related to the performance represent more abstract relationships. This category includes, for example, the product packaging or the storefront, the price (particularly important for categorising the product or brand in terms of its relative value), type of usage, and user type. The attributes linked to the latter can be formed through direct contact with other users, or indirectly through the media, namely from the profile defined for them by advertising.

Benefits are what people believe the brand or product can do for them. Assuming some degree of overlap, three categories can be distinguished, according to their underlying motivations. Functional benefits are generally identified with the resolution of external consumption needs and associated with basic motivations, such as the desire to solve (or prevent) a problem. Experiential benefits are those

related to what one feels when using products or services and provide the satisfaction of needs of a sensory and cognitive nature. Symbolic benefits usually correspond to the satisfaction of needs related to social approval, credibility, or the assertion of status. This type of benefit is particularly relevant in socially visible brands.

The strength of an association depends on how information related to its referent (product, brand, organization) is processed and kept in memory. The strength of an association is a function of the quantity and quality of information processing in the coding phase (e.g., a great elaboration on the meaning of the information related to a product can lead to strong resulting associations). The degree of evaluation of associations is related to the importance attributed to them (it is more difficult to create a favourable association with an attribute that is not considered important) and the type of situation (e.g., the speed of a service may be especially valued in a rushing situation).

Finally, in addition to characterization by type, strength and evaluation, associations also vary depending on the relationships that are created between them. Associations may or may not be shared. The existence of exclusive associations, if they are evaluated favourably, allows an effective differentiation (e.g., of a brand about its competitors), thus enhancing competitive advantage. Shared associations help establish their belonging to a certain category or sector and are considered prototypical when referring to attributes and benefits considered essential, for example, to all products of a certain class (e.g., lower price on private label brands).

The evaluation and strength of an association can be affected by other associations in memory. The degree of content and meaning sharing between associations is called congruence. The congruence between associations determines the 'cohesion' of the image, making it more or less diffuse and more or less inconstant.

Lastly, secondary associations can be inferred or arise from indirect relationships. The inferred associations result from existing associations (e.g., the deduction of quality from price), the inference being a function of the perceived correlation between attributes and benefits or having an evaluative nature when a given attribute or benefit is

assessed based on another or an overall attitude. Secondary associations associated, for example, with a product may result from primary associations related to: the organisation that produces it, its country of origin, the distribution channels used, and a celebrity promoting it. Secondary associations gain particular importance when existing associations are in some way deficient and can replace associations that would otherwise be absent.

4.2. The example of a business organisation

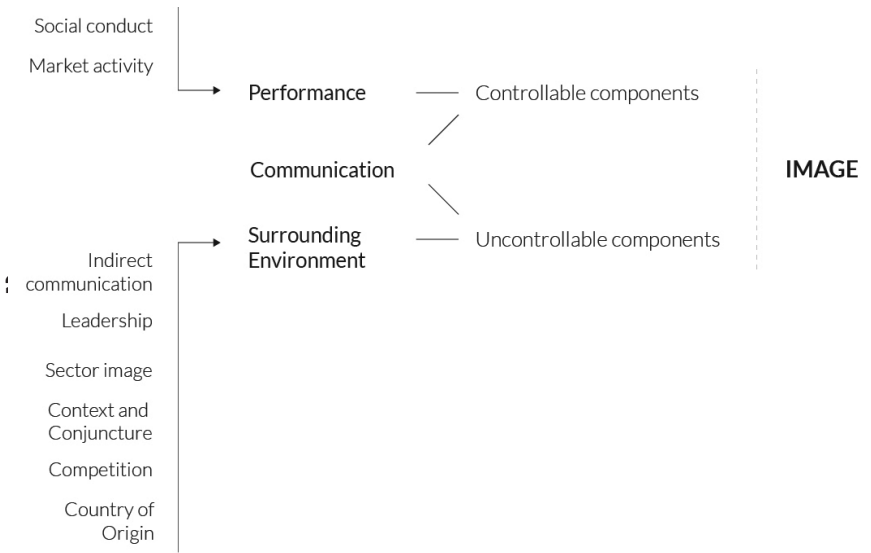
If we focus on the image of a business organisation, we find its main contributing factors to be the products it sells, the brands marketed, the services provided, the skills and empathy of its employees, its prices..., and everything that interacts with the public in some respect or capacity. But the organisation's image is defined too by the relationship it develops with its stakeholders, by its social conduct (internally and externally), and by its economic and financial records. Lastly, the organisation's image is affected by the way it communicates both its market performance and institutional positioning and by a set of factors beyond its control (Fig. 3).

The organisation's performance is considered a 'controllable' dimension. It may be divided into two groups of factors: a first group related to the market offer, and a second one concerning the organisation's social conduct.

The 'market offer' group includes products/services and brands (i.e. their characteristics, performance, configuration, durability, quality, reliability, repairability and style); the price (i.e., price list, quantity discounts, rebates, financial terms); support (e.g. education, manuals, customer training, consultancy); the sales force (size and coverage, competence, friendliness, credibility, trust, response); the associated services (installation, time and quality of repairs, availability of parts); and distribution channels (locations, service, competence).

The 'social conduct' group involves social, and business conduct. Social conduct includes internal relations, salary policies, training, and incentives for employees; externally, it translates the actions and posture concerning the environment, 'citizenship', community involvement, sponsorship

Fig. 3



actions, and support for social works, arts, and universities. Business conduct includes reputation, innovation, financial strength, and management quality.

Communications are a 'partly controllable' dimension. The manageable part consists of all planned and formal communications, divided into 'market communications', dedicated exclusively to promoting and publicising its offer, and 'institutional communication' focused on transmitting corporate information concerning social and financial performance.

Finally, the image may also be affected, in a more or less explicit way, by a set of environmental factors beyond the organisation's control. These factors often synthesise a series of beliefs, generally stereotyped, that can act as a filter through which the organisation is perceived. These are 1) the country of origin, e.g., particularly important in the automobile industry; 2) the image of the business sector, relevant, for example, in banking; 3) leadership, mostly noticeable in football clubs; 4) the social, economic, and political conjunctures; 5) the competition; 6) indirect communication by third parties. This last factor is particularly significant because it comprises, for instance, the highly credible sayings of the organisation's employees when 'off duty', and what is conveyed, shared, and discussed on social media, which has an ever-increasing impact on the image and a relevance that cannot be overlooked.

The point to retain is that the image is not necessarily what the organisation thinks it is but what the public believes or feels about the organisation, based on observation and experience, on what they know about its performance, on what the public hears the organisation say about itself, and on what others say about the organisation.

5 INTENDED IMAGE

In a marketing context, no entity can ignore the impressions it arouses. Those with management responsibilities must adopt a global perspective on communication, based on the premise that, inevitably, everything an entity does, shows, or voices, directly or indirectly, intentionally, or unconsciously, reaches those with whom it interacts. And each of the engaged audiences will form its image based on the totality of the 'signals' it receives. It is naïve to think that all communications can be controlled, just as it is unrealistic to pretend that they can be targeted exclusively (i.e., by isolating audiences).

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The image might differ according to the audiences targeted (Fig. 4). When compared to, say, a single product, an organisation is significant to a larger number of different publics, who have distinct images (assuming some degree of overlapping) depending on the type of existing relationship and according to their expectations. Some publics are closer and establish a direct and permanent relationship with the organisation (e.g., customers and employees), while others have a more distant and/or sporadic connection (e.g., shareholders, the media). From a marketing perspective, recognising that each of the different audiences will form its image based on the data relevant to them, should not prevent the organisation's main communication efforts from being directed to the segments whose behaviour most influences its performance and success.

Despite not having control over the image, it is possible to intentionally intervene in some of the elements that determine it. Firstly — and this should be an ongoing monitoring task — it is mandatory to determine the actual image with its target audiences. A qualitative, as well as quantitative analysis, should be carried out to attain a detailed diagnosis. That will allow for assessing the match between the real and intended image. Then, adjustments might be required to minimise the impact of adverse factors and simultaneously boost the ones that will protect and reinforce the planned image.

Fig. 4

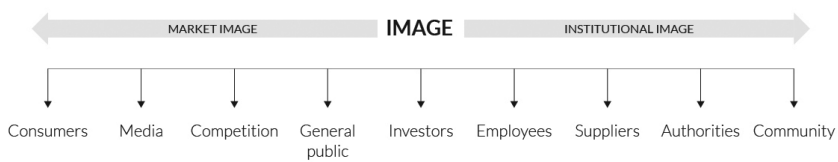


Image management is expected to rise to the requirements (and consequences) of a digital, globalized society. The internet and the advent of social networks convey new topics — interconnectivity, disintermediation, remediation — of scope and effects yet difficult to predict: taking advantage of virtual networking and interactivity, although mandatory nowadays, also carries the risk of becoming the target of unsolicited or unwanted communication actions, that spread exponentially and are uncontrollable and everlasting.

Since an entity's external image depends mainly on factors related to its performance and communications (and on how these interconnect), interventions are normally carried out in these areas. Marketing's actions generally focus on the visible, designed components: 1) products, services, and brands; 2) spaces, stores, and equipment; 3) communication and information systems; 4) visual identity. Special attention is paid to the latter, as it permeates all the previous areas. Besides ensuring visibility, recognition, and consistency regarding products, services, spaces and communications, visual identity — as the physical expression of the (intended) image — is instrumental in establishing the entity's positioning.

6 VISUAL IDENTITY

As stated before, the image we have of an organisation, brand, product, or service is determined by our experience of it, a result of their communication efforts, or a consequence of both. Performance and communications are thus the areas where marketing actions are normally carried out, and these areas involve the elements that make up the entity's identity.

The concepts of identity and image are frequently conflated, and their terms are often used interchangeably. This happens because 'identity' entails a certain ambiguity: by referring to the intrinsic characteristics of an entity — a person, a country, a brand — and, at the same time, to their identifying signs. An entity's identity consists of its central, permanent, and distinct elements; identity refers to the essence, to what remains unchanged over time, and to what is differentiating from others. In addition, an entity's identity is also determined by the so-called 'identifier' — name, logo, colours —, the visual expression it is represented by.

In marketing, identity precedes image. Managing identity is therefore considered instrumental for establishing an intended external image. Differing from the view of identity endorsed by the literature on organisational and behavioural issues — centred on the shared understanding by all the members of an entity of its distinguishing characteristics and values —, marketing sees identity as a process, focusing on the exterior, and on the connection with the external publics. The marketing function concentrates mainly on the physical representations of brands or organisations, addressing specifically their visual identity.

Visual identity derives from positioning. Positioning determines the way an entity wants to be perceived by its public in relation to its competitors and thus establishes the conceptual framework necessary for the development of a visual identity program. This is accomplished by strategically highlighting identity traces that are valued by the public and stakeholders.

Taking on the example of an organisation, visual identity essentially comprises its observable and designed components, categorised in three areas: 1) brands, products, and services; 2) spaces and equipment; and 3) communication and information systems. Intervening directly in these components is key to visually translating what the organisation does and says. Marketing's mission, when it comes to its concept, performance, and appearance, is to assure consistency with the organisation's strategy and objectives. If we consider a company with multiple products, the role of visual identity is to make visible (or invisible) the relationship between them and establish the intended relative (visual) 'distances'.

In the services sector, visual identity gains special importance by way of helping to materialise what is intangible — a service is essentially a performance whereby acquisition involves use or consumption, but not possession. The tangibles associated with services, i.e., their material components, end up functioning as indicators of the service's nature and quality and help to minimise any uncertainties related to its outcome.

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The main objective of a visual identity program is to create familiarity, assuming people tend to favour entities they know. This familiarity will naturally correlate to greater effectiveness of the communicational efforts and an easier differentiation from others. The notion that the public's evaluation of brands is somehow affected by the appraisal of their visual image is supported by some literature on brand identity. It is also suggested that any empathy created with the visual image is transferred to the brand over time and with extended exposure. However, according to the (scarce) academic research on the subject, the extent of the visual identity's contribution to a brand's success or failure or the formation of its overall image is still to be established on a rigorous basis. So far, empirical evidence has established only the positive contribution of the visual identity system in its identification functions and awareness raising. The importance of permanent visual elements, particularly of the identifier, compared to others of a more transient sort, e.g., advertising, doesn't rely so much on any intrinsic visual qualities, but rather on their ubiquity, that is, on being the most common elements in all visual communication and promotional actions.

In terms of communication effectiveness, a visual identity is also a valuable tool to signal changes or to illustrate a new condition. An altered or adjusted visual identity is often the first evidence that something has changed. The visual identity's modification acquires a strategic dimension when it establishes a rupture, which generally forces changing even the brand's name, or when it indicates a new positioning, suggested simply by a new logo or a different colour scheme. Furthermore, it can also acquire an instrumental purpose when it communicates a new leadership (and often does so without other reason than to simply state changes to the management team) or when it portrays, for instance, new brand extensions — Caterpillar's introducing of flagship brand 'Cat' signalled the company's expansion from its core business — manufacturing of construction equipment — to a whole new and diversified portfolio of products and services, from mining excavators to finance, from marine engines to boots. The contraction of the brand name to a one-syllable word made it easier to pronounce and more effective in terms of communication. Moreover, the switch of the representational figure — from a caterpillar to a cat — conveyed a new (universally more familiar) meaning to the brand, and symbolically added flexibility and grace to resilience and grip. Identity prevailed because the brand's original underlying concept was preserved, an intent also attested by the maintenance of the previous visual characteristics such as symbol, typeface, and colour palette.

There are three alternative approaches to managing visual identity related to branding. Firstly, there's the 'monolithic' approach (Fig. 5), where the whole shares the successes and failures of its parts, and all products and services, regardless of their nature, are to be identified by the same name and visual style — 'Virgin' is an example of this type of branding strategy, by extending its brand name and logo to all its business operations, from entertainment to health & wellness, from media to travel & leisure, from financial services to space quests. On the other side of the spectrum, we find businesses that opt to operate through a series of autonomous brands (Fig. 6), each with its own visual identity, intentionally unrelated to each other, nor related to the mother company — 'Procter and Gamble' sits as an example with over 60 individually tailored brands organised in ten product

Fig. 5

THE BRAND
(technology)

THE BRAND
(airlines)

THE BRAND
(clothing)

THE BRAND
(health)

THE BRAND
(...)

Monolithic

Fig. 6



Fig. 7

YOUR BRAND

OUR BRAND

THEIR BRAND

HER BRAND

HIS BRAND

Endorsed

categories; Tide, Braun, Gillette, Crest, Pantene, are some of its best-known labels. Lastly, in between the two previous alternatives, lies the ‘endorsed’ approach (Fig. 7), where there is a deliberate imprint of the mother company on apparently independent brands — Nestlé, for instance, uses the prefix ‘Nes’ in some of its products: Nespresso, Nestea, Nescafé. Apple also qualifies for an endorsed strategy, as the shared ‘i’ guarantees that the brand ethos reaches all products. Apple is an excellent case study on visual identity management: all their products, packaging, communications, and stores are easily identified with the parent brand and are linked to each other because they comply with the same visual design principles — an identical ‘visual theme’ permeates all business areas, creating a familiar visual ‘umbrella’.

7 **THE IDENTIFIER**

At the core of the visual identity system stands what we designate as the 'identifier'. This comprises the name, graphic symbol, logo, and associated typeface, and set of colours. The identifier plays a central role in the image formation process. The identifier is the entity's flag: it expresses its standard and comprises its visual promise. It represents an ongoing and cumulative investment that influences the perceived value of everything it identifies. It is particularly useful to ensure recognition and induce familiarity. As such, its significance is greater in situations of prior assessment — e.g., when awareness depends solely on promotional or communication factors —, and it will lessen gradually as experience and personal contact take over.

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7.1. The Name

The name is the main identifier of the brand. Brand names incorporate both verbal and visual dimensions that give them added valence as a means of identification. It is usually the first contact between the public and the brand and lies at the base of all its communications. The name constitutes the very essence of the brand. Over time its importance comes from the ability to aggregate a set of associations that describe and define the brand — what it is, what it does, what it represents, and what it guarantees.

Naming is vital to stand out and to stand for something, amidst the cluttered marketplace. From a strategic viewpoint, the suitability of a brand name can be assessed along two dimensions: 1) the ease with which the name can be encoded into, retained in and retrieved from memory and 2) the extent to which the name supports or enhances the strategic positioning of the brand.

Brand names are more effective and easier to remember when they are: 1) simple; 2) likeable; 3) concise, with less than three syllables, less than three words, less than 13 characters; 4) unique; 5) memorable, inducing a mental image;

6) easy to read and spell, phonetically appealing and easily pronounced; 7) easy to visualise; 8) ownable, i.e., easily protected, able to be trademarked and associated with its URL; 9) global, avoiding foreign language snafus; 10) timeless, avoiding trends and fads traps; 11) fitted to the brand's personality; 12) potentially shortened or abbreviated, provided the abridged version doesn't lose its meaning.

As an example, the brand name 'Visa' appears to comprise all the basic essential features: it is distinct (it identifies and differentiates simultaneously), relevant (it conveys the nature of the service and the associated benefit); it is memorable (is easy to seize, use and remember), flexible (it is comprehensive enough not to hinder future associated activities) and universal (i.e., it overcomes language barriers and it does not prevent future brand extensions).

Brand names can be abstract or meaningful. Brand names may have a meaning related to the product or activity branded (e.g., Newsweek [weekly news magazine]), may have a meaning unrelated to the product or activity (e.g., Apple, Gap), may even create a new meaning of their own (e.g., [to] Google), they may semantically evoke the products promise or associated benefit (e.g., Die Hard Batteries, LinkedIn, Juicy Fruit), they may be coined (e.g., Kodak, Xerox), or even refer to an invented reality — Häagen-Dazs may sound Danish, but it was conceived of in the Bronx, NY.

Empirical evidence indicates that products with meaningful brand names that are visually represented are preferred to brand names of an abstract nature. Research has shown that they are easier to remember and can enhance the development of memory structures for brand-related information communicated in advertising. Furthermore, products with brand names that supplemented sound symbolism with semantics to convey the relative product benefit were received more favourably and positioned more strongly in the minds of the public. A suggestive brand name can contribute to brand equity by producing strong brand associations. Indeed, one argument for extending existing brand names onto different products (e.g., Timberland clothing) is that the brand name carries information about the product (e.g., ruggedness). This information reduces the risk associated with the new product (brand extension) and, in turn, enhances product liking.

However, on the other hand, the use of semantics may compromise the ability of the brand to be later repositioned or extended. Brand names that strongly suggest certain product benefits can be difficult to link to new brand associations — Old Spice, for example, would probably strive to attain a more youthful image — and are harder to extend into categories where the claimed benefit is irrelevant or unvalued. Furthermore, the use of semantics can impair the distinctive character of the name, compromising its protection against trademark infringement, or lead to inadvisable connotations in international markets.

Sometimes a brand name will be automatically shortened by the public — e.g., Federal Express to FedEx, which the company ended up adopting. Other times, this corresponds to a deliberate strategic action on the part of the company. Resorting to initials might be mandatory to overtake an anachronism or the obsolescence of the original meaning. When Kentucky Fried Chicken chose to shorten its brand name to KFC, it achieved two things: hiding the ‘fried’, in response to more health-conscious times, and improving effectiveness in terms of communication — less is more in an ever-growing congested marketplace. Along the same pathway, we may find General Electric to GE, America Online to AOL, Hewlett Packard to HP, and Coca-Cola to Coke.

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7.2. The graphic symbol

Graphic symbols may, on their own, ensure brand identification. They are generally grouped, according to their typology, into four categories: pictorial, personalised, abstract, and typographic (Figs. 8 to 11).

Graphic symbols’ virtues lie in their ability to overcome language barriers — symbols such as, for instance, the dollar sign or the hashtag, are potentially universal. Nonetheless, this attribute may simultaneously become a design problem, since graphic symbols can acquire different (unintended, undesirable) meanings depending on the cultural context in which they are inserted. Furthermore, because they are difficult to memorise, they may prove difficult to recognize when not combined with a name–equivocal recall, i.e., the association of a graphic symbol with the wrong brand is relatively

Fig. 8



Pictorial

Fig. 9



Personalised

Fig. 10



Abstract

Fig. 11



Typographic

common. These limitations may be overcome by massive publicity to assure wide unequivocal recognition (e.g., Nike's 'Swoosh' or McDonald's 'Golden Arches') or by a symbol/logo combination. In reality, the quest for greater effectiveness in communication and promotion procedures over the years has somehow led most business organisations to opt for logos over graphic symbols to identify their brands.

7.3. The logo (and typeface)

As the graphic depiction of the brand's name, the logo is a set of typographic or calligraphic characters (Fig. 12 and 13). It must ensure that the brand's name is read clearly and unambiguously, while at the same time expressing more than a mere combination of type characters. Logos can take the form of abbreviations when only the full name's initials are used (e.g., YMCA, BMW, KFC), or acronyms when the abbreviation can be pronounced as a word (e.g., NASA, Audi).

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The typeface, whether exclusive or not, may become a relevant part of the visual identity system if consistently and extensively used in most of the brand's communication actions. Because type is inherent to most corporate communications, the typeface should be carefully selected to ensure consistency with other elements of the visual identity strategy — e.g., Mercedes uses the same font — Corporate A BQ Light — in all its visual communications; BMW has its version of classic Helvetica.

Fig. 12

THE BRAND

Fig. 13

theBrand

7.4. The colour scheme

The colour scheme is generally seen as a complementary support to identification, although it may occasionally become the dominant factor in the brand's entire communication strategy. Colour is particularly effective at conveying emotion and inciting sensations. Its influence depends on its association with natural phenomena — energy is automatically associated with warm colours, and companies working in this market traditionally opt to use red, orange, or yellow in their brand identifier. At the same time, colour may acquire different meanings according to the cultural references of each context, and its usage can also be influenced by present social or economic trends — several of the companies referred to above are changing the colours of their energy brand from red or orange, colours presently at risk of being associated with, for instance, global warming, to greens and blues, colours that best emulate/reflect current public demands: clean energy, obtained from renewable sources and environmentally friendly. On the downside, colour is the only element of the identifier that cannot be registered as a trademark, thus being subject to appropriation and copying.

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In marketing, the importance of image stems from its ability to affect attitudes, which, in turn, influence behaviour. This happens because our decisions are often based on a mentally constructed reality — an image —, composed of our beliefs and feelings. An image is thus a mental representation of a network of associations. Every image is personal and subjective, simplifying, selective and stable. It expresses our knowledge and attitude towards a given subject and allows us to assign meaning to it.

Among the many meanings that 'image' can acquire, marketing focuses on the external view of the concept — image as the result of the perception of something. According to this perspective, the image 'belongs' to the public. The image is what the public believes or feels about its subject and is founded on their observation and experience, on what the subject shows or says and on what others say about it. This implies acknowledging that images are always valid, even though they could be based on erroneous or imprecise beliefs.

In a marketing context, an entity's external image depends mainly on factors related to its performance and communication actions. Thus, interventions are to be carried out on its products, services, and brands; its spaces and equipment; and its communication and information systems. Together, they define the entity's visual identity. The goal of a visual identity programme is therefore to make the brand or organisation's intended positioning perceptible and valued by its public. At the core of the visual identity lies the identifier — essentially the name, logo, and colour scheme. Assuming a central role in the image formation process, the identifier's primary function is to ensure unambiguous recognition of the entity it represents and an automatic recall of its nature and purpose.

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Volumes

1. Carlos Vidal
2. João Castro Silva
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