

BRAND

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It. *Marca, Marchio*; Fr. *Marque*; Germ. *Marke*; Span. *Marca*. "Brand", from the ancient Norse *brandr* (to burn), originally refers to the practice of livestock marking. The term includes all graphic signs, names, symbols and images used to uniquely identify a product and a company differentiating it from other producers and conveying information about its identity and quality. While logo and trademark designate a legally recognized label, the meaning of the word brand has extended to include everything that represents the intangible qualities that define the identity of a product, a person or a cultural phenomenon. In relation to the aesthetic dimension, this identity is primarily conveyed through sensory and formal features of the brand and product, but is also enriched with abstract symbolic and emotional values, which have significant cultural impact (Floch 1995).

FROM ORIGINS TO CONTEMPORARY TIMES

For centuries, artisans have marked the goods they produced in order to allow their identification. In ancient Rome, the *titulus pictus* on artifacts like amphorae and pottery gave information about the manufacturer, the destination and sometimes advertised its qualities. However, what we understand today as modern branding did not begin until the second half of the 19th century. Before that time, most commodities were still sold unmarked and unbranded. With the industrialization and globalization of production means, goods have become more and more undifferentiated and interchangeable. Therefore, brands not only allowed for the differentiation of generic products and services, but they also stave off the downward pressures of manufacturing cost and profit margin through the creation of intangible qualities and symbolic values. Brands today are "weightless" assets (Klein 2000: 4), objects of value themselves, possessing their own personalities (Aaker 1997) and are almost independent from the commodities they represent. The imaginary associations and emotions that it evokes determine a brand's value. They are carriers of *affective energy* (Allison 2009); they trigger a sense of trust and connection or even love (Foster 2007).

This explains the rising centrality of marketing or, as Baudrillard (1981) critically observed, the shift from the consumption of physical products to the consumption of signs and symbols. The consumer does not buy the object as a result of advertising; rather, he buys into the ideology and symbolic meanings signaled by the advertisement. This means that brands are mediators of cultural meaning and resources for individual identity self-construction: by consuming different brands, a person is able to construct a social self and communicate his identity to others. This construction takes place by using aesthetic strategies: symbols, metaphors and allegories that endow brands with psychological and social properties that address people's need for social recognition, happiness and wellbeing.

BRAND AND AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

Georg Simmel, commenting on the Berlin Trade Fair of 1896, defined the "shop-window-quality" of goods in the modern consumption world: "Where competition no longer operates in matters of usefulness and intrinsic properties, the interest of the buyer has to be aroused by the external stimulus of the object" (1991: 122). Aesthetic qualities are functional to the identification of the brand through catchy advertising messages, graphics, and the perceivable features of products' and logos' designs. These aspects should not only be aesthetically pleasant and captivating, but they should allow for the coherent identification of the brand and its "personality".

Moreover, between brand and aesthetic dimension there exists a two-way relationship: on the one hand, quality is not a given, consumers are guided by brands in the interpretation of what they are seeing. As experimental studies show (Jacoby *et al.* 1971, Render *et al.* 1976, Rigaux-Bricmont 1982), the subjective feeling of a product's quality is influenced by brand and label awareness. On the other hand, the value of the brand is conveyed primarily through the aesthetic dimension related to the object's design and the varieties of product display.

Since the end of the 20th century, the aesthetic dimension has assumed an even more central role for the brand, becoming not only a tool for communicating the product's value, but also the primary object of attention and consumption. The brand thus dissociates itself from its products, shifting from the consumption of artifacts to the consumption of sensations, emotions and aesthetic experiences. Consequently, "marketing aesthetics" and "emotional branding" (Gobé 2001, Postrel 2013) describe the set of strategies aimed at pursuing the affective involvement of the consumer. Pine and Gilmore (1999) define *experience economy* as the transformation of economic exchange of products in spectacles that aim to emotionally involve consumers and playfully engage them. This development can be seen as the expression of a general "aestheticization of everyday life" (Featherstone 2007, Lipovetsky 2013, Matteucci 2017). The scenario of a hyper-consumer world and of an entertainment society described by the theorizations of Benjamin, Débord and Baudrillard seems to come true.

BRAND AND THE ARTS

Being the expression of a worldview and a lifestyle, brands today actively engage in "cultural engineering"

(Holt 2002) through their symbolic power. This is also achieved by drawing inspiration from significant cultural and social phenomena that are apparently not linked to commerce, such as the appropriation of the radical image of subculture rebelliousness, the provocations of innovative artistic avant-gardes, and the humanitarian spirit of social and political movements. Participating in social relevant issues (e.g. Benetton's anti-war campaigns) and investing resources for culturally relevant projects (e.g. Prada Foundation's artistic curatorial projects) is a way to enhance the perception and the symbolic value of the brand associated with these operations.

The specific interaction between industry and the art world is an example of strategy in which the brand tries to dissociate itself from its original commercial purpose and to acquire cultural value and meaning. Art and artists have interacted with brands in several ways. In the first place, artists appropriated the signs of brand culture and the images of the consumer's world in their work. Secondly, the mechanisms of contemporary art today come close to typical marketing strategies transforming the artist himself into a brand: "Successful artists can be thought of as brand managers, actively engaged in developing, nurturing, and promoting themselves as recognizable 'products' in the competitive cultural sphere" (Schroeder 2005: 1292). Finally, the market tries in different circumstances to draw inspiration from the artistic production as a strategy for cultural enhancement.

Pop Art is a full-blown example of these interrelations. Notoriously, Andy Warhol (1928-1987) included brands in many of his works, offering insights into consumption and marketing culture, and at the same time building his own artistic image into a recognizable cultural brand. The relationship between Warhol's artistic production and brand culture is also reinforced by the reverse appropriation of his own style, later marketed in advertising images, posters, decorations and mass consumption objects. The artist Barbara Krueger (1945) is another example of this two-way appropriation. Coming from the advertising industry, like Warhol, Krueger's works (consisting mostly of bold typed slogans) display a critical stance toward commodification and consumer culture, but marketers (Schroeder, 2000) have also readily appropriated them. For example, her famous piece *Untitled (I Shop Therefore I Am, 1987)* was ironically used as an advertising campaign. In 1994, a streetwear brand admittedly used her recognizable typeface style for their logo.

In other cases, the relationship between artist and brand is explicit and collaborative. In the 80s, a famous liquor brand begun to collaborate with Andy Warhol for its advertising campaign, later followed by the participation of artists such as Keith Haring and Damien Hirst. In the fashion industry, where brand plays a predominant role in shaping the image and the value of products, its relationship with the art world has also been frequent. The first notable examples are Salvador Dalí's creations for Elsa Schiaparelli in the 30s through to the current collaboration of renowned artists (like, for example, Jeff Koons, Cindy Sherman, and Marina Abramović) with famous fashion powerhouses.

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