

Consolidate brand loyalty through a design emphasis on long term strategic benefit

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Abstract

With the ever growing supply of consumer products it becomes increasingly important for a brand to set itself apart and appeal to consumers with its vision. Functionality becomes subsidiary to the emotional value: both the product and brand need to fit the lifestyle and ideals of the consumer. In this paper the possibility will be discussed to achieve this ideal presentation of brand image through design, in specific: by putting the design emphasis on long term strategic benefit of the product. A product translation needs to be made that satisfies both the desires by the brand and the desires by the target group. This product translation will be done using the theory provided by B. Tool and G. Moss and applied to a redesign of the Philips humidifier. Based on this research a model of recognition will be presented for similar design circumstances. The process of conceptualisation will also be explained and eventually result in a final design.

Keywords

Brand loyalty, Gender design, Design and emotion, Design management

1 INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, consumers have a seemingly infinite choice of products often without significant differences between competing products. Thus it becomes increasingly important for a brand to create a strong image and appeal to their target group, in order to survive and grow on this saturated market. By effectively conveying brand values through design, one can consolidate consumer loyalty to the brand.

To be able to achieve this, one needs to aim for a synergy between brand, product and target group. So it is paramount to:

- attain a good insight into the history and development of the brand and the values carried by the brand;
- have a fresh view on the product that needs to be developed or redesigned;
- acquire a deep understanding of the target group and its desires.

For optimum results it is recommended to be consistent and apply the method to every stage of the product's lifecycle, from concept generation to packaging and advertising (figure 1). Based on the above premise a redesign is made of the evaporative humidifier by Philips, which is described in this paper.

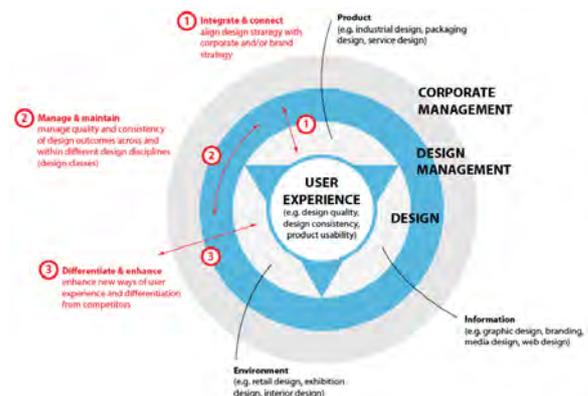


Figure 1: Design Management Overview

2 BRAND ANALYSIS

2.1 Philips: the brand

2.1.1 History

Established in 1891 in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, Philips & Co. was founded to meet the growing demand for light bulbs following the commercialization of electricity. As Philips' business activities expanded rapidly, so did the advertising and marketing campaigns which were carried out at product level on a local market basis. The need for a global representation of the brand was first met in 1995 with the introduction of the tagline "Let's make things better" – a unified company image was created.

The next milestone was in 2004 when Philips launched its "Sense and simplicity" tagline with the promise to provide products and services that are "designed around you, easy to experience and advanced". Accompanied with this tagline a restructuring of the company took place, creating

the divisions *healthcare, consumer lifestyle* and *lighting*.

2.1.2 Brand archetype

Philips' history and decisions show they try to position the brand as a "caregiver" and a "sage", according to the brand archetype model (Pearson, 2001) (figure 2). The caregiver is a very powerful and positive archetype, reflecting qualities such as compassion, empathy, anticipating people's needs, and trust. The sage holds faith that through understanding and knowledge the world can become a better place, reflecting qualities such as dignity, wisdom, and expertise.

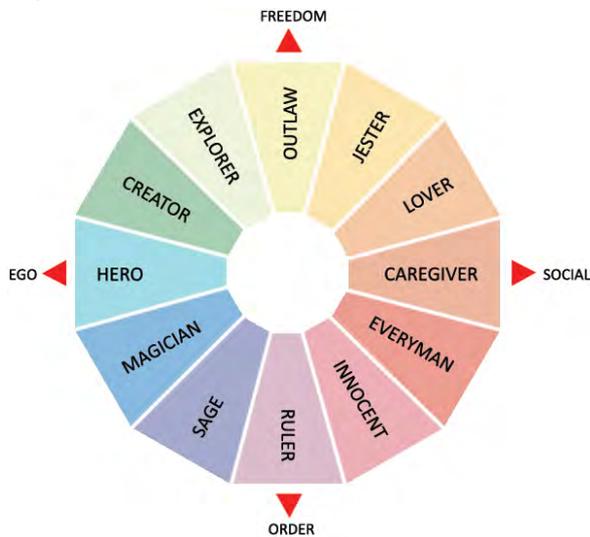


Figure 2: Brand Archetype Model

2.1.3 Brand values and product perception

The promise of "Sense and simplicity" has to be delivered to the consumer. By understanding people and technology integration and product design, one can achieve this goal.

Product perception by the consumer is part of understanding the consumer. In case of the humidifier one needs to take a step back and identify the important elements and the problems. These factors can then be compared to the brand promise.

A humidifier is a caring product, one that improves the quality of the air we breathe and thus nourishes our health and well-being. Due to its size and appearance however, it is a product the consumer tends to hide away in corners, behind couches, or on top of cabinets. This creates several problems however:

- the humidifier is not placed in the optimum location
- the humidifier could create damp spots
- maintenance, refilling and general operating becomes difficult

To address these issues, a review of the evaporative humidifier is required. Using the

strengths and weaknesses of the product in combination with the brand promise, we can derive that the humidifier needs to be redesigned to be placed at a central location in the house and that it should be simple to use. The latter applies to everything from interface to refilling and cleaning.

3 TARGET GROUP

3.1 Choice

The choice of target group should be a logical step after determining the brand values and the product values. As mentioned earlier, the humidifier is a caring product: a characteristic that befits Philips as a brand. This is a characteristic that would appeal to the female target group perfectly.

Considering that up to 80% of all consumer purchasing decisions are made by women (Eden, Enga, Lin, & Reimann, 2006), choosing women as a target group for the humidifier redesign is an ideal choice. To narrow down the field a bit further, the case is targeted at working women age 20 to 40 years old in particular. By doing so, a clear analysis of their desires, wishes, expectations, etc can be made.

3.2 Preferences

The appearance of a product can be perceived as "male" or "female", depending on the shape, colour, interface, etc.

Considering the fact that most designs are still made for and by men (Eden, Enga, Lin, & Reimann, 2006), it is no surprise that oftentimes stereotypes are applied when trying to design for women. There is prevalent behaviour however with regards to the appearance of products, as studies show.

For men the use of straight aggressive lines, hard surfaces, a three dimensional quality, a large size, a different use of color and most aspects related to cars have a positive influence on men. Women are more into soft surfaces, round & fluent shapes, detail & pattern, less emphasis on three-dimensionality, themes based around plant life, a subtle use of humor and themes focused on women rather than men (Moss, 2003)

This perception of differences between male and female design is substantiated by Aaltojärvi (Aaltojärvi, 2009). In the article by Aaltojärvi, the masculine and feminine attributes of domestic technologies were probed and documented. The results are summed up in figure 3.

Mood boards of the target group confirm the preference with regards to shapes and colours.

Attribute	Masculine	Feminine
Appearance	Big, angular, black, static, ugly, many buttons and indicators	Rounded corners, portable, beautiful, light colours, simple looking
Usability	Hard to use, requires expertise	Easy to use, if requires expertise it is common sense
Technicality	Lot of technique	Simple technique
Sound	Noisy, aggressive	Silent, percolating
Rate of Novelty	New innovation	Old and familiar, archaic
Use	Entertainment, status improvement	Cleaning, cooking, cosmetic care

Figure 3. Masculine and Feminine Attributes

3.3 Causes and reasons

Most of the differences in preference with regards to shapes, colours, etc can be explained simply due to physical differences between males and females. Though factors such as societal influences and the familiarity effect (preference depending on exposure at a young age) should not be disregarded easily either (Moss, 2003).

Just looking at the differences in physique between men and women it is not surprising we have different desires. Women are built for childbirth and nursing the progeny, men to procreate and protect the nest. The primeval situation is also established in the brain function, which is evident in biological processes such as hormone regulation. We have not yet evolved to be able to control this. As an extension of this there are fundamental differences in behaviour, thinking and feeling (Delfos, 2001).

Since a woman is traditionally first responsible for caring for the offspring, she is programmed to be emotionally affected by babies. At the brain function level this means that this tenderness is evoked by round shapes (Delfos, 2001).

The mother is responsible for the care for her children; a safe and warm home is a must in order to succeed in providing this care. Women are by nature involved with the home, creating a safe, warm environment. Empathy is an important factor in this process. The care from a man's side consists of defending the safe, warm home. In the primeval state aggression was necessary to achieve this. As it is not possible to be aggressive towards a person and at the same time to empathize with them, it is biologically necessary that men are less capable of this. This natural disposition also explains women's need to search for security and safety: due to the low

testosterone level, women are more inclined to anxiety and possibly paralysis instead of action and decisiveness when faced with danger or even aggression (Delfos, 2001).

In addition to that: women pay more attention to benefits on the long term. Women look at the strategic benefits, while men tend to pay more attention to short term gratification (Tool, 2002).

Factors such as three-dimensionality can be explained by very basic Men's preference for three dimensional vision may be related to the fact that men's eyes are 4 cms further apart than women's, as well as to the fact that the part of the brain used for three-dimensional vision, the inferior parietal lobe, is larger in men than in women (Moss, 2003).

Women's instinct for colour on the other hand, may be related to the lower incidence of colour blindness amongst females than males. On average, 8% of males suffer from colour blindness as compared with 0.5% of females. This goes some way as to explaining why women are able to identify more different colours than men.

3.4 Product applications

The next step is trying to apply the acquired knowledge, because how does this affect our perception of products?

The car industry offers an interesting insight into this phenomenon. Women tend to feel attracted to car models with round shapes. The New Beetle and the Ford Ka are clear examples. Men on the other hand are attracted to bigger cars (Tool, 2002).

Men look at cars and see the functionality first, aesthetics comes second. For women this is exactly the other way around: they are attracted by the aesthetic value first and then judge the functionality.

This is a clear case of our prevalent behaviour clashing with our contemporary demands: the reason women feel attracted to the smaller car with rounder shapes is safety. The woman perceives the smaller car as safer, based on their own preferences with regards to appearance. However, in case of a crash a bigger car would offer more safety than a small car (Tool, 2002). This sort of paradox needs to be overcome with design.

An interesting case that shows a correct application of such knowledge is Volvo's concept car, designed for and by women. Their unique look on car design does not just show in appearance such as shape and colour, it also applies to the functionality. From the way the doors open to the way maintenance is performed: this car is unique and tailored to women. It is an example of design for women

and the same ideology will be applied to the redesign of the evaporative humidifier.

4 DESIGN METHOD

To translate all the data into an effective design that supports the goal of consolidating brand loyalty through design, all factors need to be kept in mind and have the same aspirations.

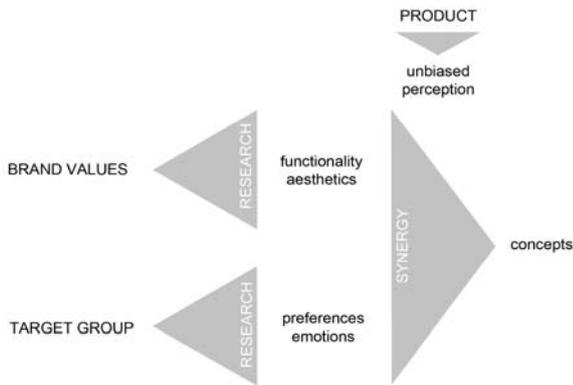


Figure 4. Design method for brand loyalty

The model in figure 4 is very effective when designing products that require a new innovative approach. The structure of the model keeps into account all the parties involved and does not try to burden or contaminate the idea generation phase with products of competitors, because the market research is introduced later on in the process. By doing this, it is easier to look at the product and see its true value, both towards the brand and the consumer, leading to innovative ideas.

This model has been applied to the redesign of the humidifier. All information acquired about the brand, target group and product are converted into positive ideas. It is important to keep an open mind and see strengths and opportunities rather than problems.

Lastly, one must not forget that after creating the concepts, there is the matter of optimising the design.

5 THE DESIGN

5.1 Reviewing the product

The evaporative humidifier in its original configuration looks clinical and mechanical, has a lot of interface options and is rather large due to the choice of evaporative technique and water content. As has been mentioned before it, more often than not, ends up hidden away somewhere, not fulfilling its function effectively.

Based on the research the brand wishes to offer sense and simplicity, to cater to the consumer's wishes by "designing around them". The target group wishes to have a product that fulfils the promise of improving air quality, but does not

want the product to be intrusive or hard to operate.

5.2 Concept generation

Based on the values described, concepts were made to address the issues at hand. In particular, the values: ease of use, curved surfaces and familiarity were used.

This led to the realisation that the humidifier relies on design conventions that can be stretched at will, as long as it either touches on common sense or follows conventions attached to other products.

The concepts aim to ensure that the product will be able to fulfil its function perfectly and naturally, and that the consumer will be able to operate and maintain the product in the most convenient way possible, as can be seen in figure 5. All concepts try to turn the humidifier into a central object, something you wish to place in the centre of the room because you want to, not because you have to. The concepts also touch on conventions of use of different products.



Figure 5. Concepts based on the conceived premise.

As can be seen with the concepts, TRIZ was used to exploit the large size of the evaporative technique desired by Philips: rather than see the large size as a design obstacle, it is chosen to use as an advantage.

5.3 Final design

The third concept was chosen to further develop, because the design conventions and projected ease of use were considered superior to the other two concepts.

By pushing the brand values of Philips further than they have considered possible with this product, new and innovative ways of use have become possible.

The most important issue the concept addresses is that the target group needs to want to place the product in a central location, rather than that they have to place it there. By making it desirable, one can ensure that the product is easily accessible for maintenance and refilling, but more importantly: the central location allows the humidifier to best fulfil its function (figure 6).



Figure 6. The redesigned Philips humidifier

5.3.1 Features

The Volvo car design shows the power of small improvements and has been used as inspiration for the redesign of the evaporative humidifier.

The concept is easy to refill because of the drop shaped indentation on top of the table. One can simply “water the table” with a watering can: a convention that tags along to the daily routine of watering your plants.

The drawer is held up naturally due to the shape of the exterior framework and is at the perfect height for the user to operate. The drawer consists of two components: a water reservoir (left side), and the main drawer with the components such as the wick and the fan.

The water reservoir slides into the main drawer and is tapered at the end, to facilitate removal and insertion. It also lowers the water reservoir slightly when sliding out, allowing access to a handle at the back of the water reservoir making the reservoir very easy to carry.

Both components are void of hard to reach areas, as to make it easy to clean. Both components of the drawer are suitable for dish washers.

The buttons on the front are level with the surface, to make the product easier to clean and to ensure that the user will not accidentally hit the buttons while dusting the product.

The power cord located at the back has its own indentation in the leg of the framework, and is accompanied by a power cord retraction system as we know it in vacuum cleaners. This feature makes the humidifier easier to transport, will reduce visual pollution of the power cord and to reduce chances of accidentally tripping over the cord (or pulling the cord: in case of kids).

The legs of the humidifier contain small wheels in the bottom, to allow the user to easily move the product around if desired.

The interface is kept as simple as possible: the amount of features is kept to a bare minimum as to not burden the user with an overload of options. The product needs to improve the air quality and the device knows best how to achieve that. So a power button, a humidity check button, and a silent mode button are more than sufficient. A clear strip of polycarbonate on the water reservoir allows the user to see the water level instantly, and a red LED will light up the water reservoir in case it is empty or requires other desperate attention (such as cleaning).

Feedback of the buttons is kept simple as well. When a button is pressed, the button gives feedback by briefly flashing in a certain colour. For example: when the power button is pressed to turn the product on, it flashes green a few times. When the power button is pressed again to turn the product off, the button will flash red a few times.

The humidifier makes use of a small container with scented granules, similar to the one in the Philips Inneergizer. It allows the user to spread a nice scent in their house if desired.

5.3.2 Appearance

The appearance of the product is carefully chosen, considering how women value aesthetics first (Tool, 2002). The material and shape need to appeal to the target group, but must also fit the brand. The shape is a curved one, to show elegance, but also to show safety – after all, there are no sharp edges you can hurt yourself on.

The smaller “waist” of the product suits women’s desire to reflect themselves in their products.

The slightly bulgy part at the end of the legs is a reference to the old and familiar (archaic shapes), but it also gives the entire product a more balanced and sturdy look, appealing to women’s desire for safety.

The pattern on the inside of the product adds personality to the product; it allows the consumer to customise their product. This is not new for Philips as a brand: they already allow this with their Philips Senseo. Mood boards made about the target group substantiate the desire for such features.

The material is ABS, mostly because it is easy to clean and allows for easy production (injection moulding). It fits the target group perfectly as well, especially with a slightly off white colour. Again this is substantiated by the mood boards.

5.3.3 Brand benefits

The product is now unique compared to the products offered by competitors. This is a major advantage on a saturated market, because it makes the brand very recognisable (thus generating brand loyalty) and it makes the product stand out from the competitors’.

The product makes use of modularity, which is a very powerful tool for companies to cut down costs both on manufacturing as on service. For instance, the drawer and the exterior framework are separate components: in case the water container becomes damaged, it can easily be replaced without having to send the entire product back for repairs.

The product also makes use of features that other products offered by the brand already make use of: think of the scented granule system and the selection of patterns. By using the same channels for different products, the overall costs will be lower.

The material of the product is the same as the materials currently used, thus the company does not have to change their production processes.

By creating an experience in the form of a table, the product increases in value, value the customer is willing to pay extra. This should outweigh the added costs of transport, or at least compensate for it.

5.3.4 Additional features

The future could hold many exciting new features. One could think of changing the interface by using capacitance sensors and OLED displays placed underneath the surface of the humidifier. This would further enhance the aesthetic value of the product. Of course one needs to keep in mind the MAYA principle (most advanced yet acceptable), so it would not be wise to implement this straight away.

Philips could have their products interact with each other, further improving brand loyalty. In case of the humidifier one could think of allowing the Philips Digital Photo Frame to communicate with the humidifier. This would allow detailed information about the humidifier to be displayed

on the digital photo frame on top of the humidifier.

6 DISCUSSION

Research shows there are many differences between male and female design. The way each gender looks at products differs and that needs to be taken into account and addressed properly.

Considering the fact that most designs are made by men and for men, it is no surprise there is a lot of opportunity for improvement. Brands could use this to their advantage, especially seeing as women tend to pay more attention to long term strategic benefits than men do and the fact that women are responsible for up to 80% of all purchasing decisions. All these factors combined make them a perfect target group for improvement of brand loyalty.

Because so many different factors need to be taken into account, it can become difficult to keep a clear overview. The model should help with that by introducing the problem in stages. Another pitfall would be to try and make too many compromises with regards to the design in order to try and please every party involved.

Considering the importance of brand management and customer loyalty in our contemporary saturated market, this tool should certainly be considered for future designs.

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8 BIOGRAPHY



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