



Visual Identity Design as a Cultural Interface of a Territory

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Abstract. The purpose of the article is to study how the brand's visual identity contributes to the understanding, accessibility and enjoyment of information, adapting the message to different cultures and profiles of people, users or target audiences. Identity promotes sustainability and respect for people's quality of life. The methodology used is mixed, including a non-interventionist phase consisting in the study of competing brands, audience map and persona method and an interventionist component through project-grounded design research, which includes participatory methods such as co-design and Design thinking. The results are a visual identity of the mountain olive oils brand that acts simultaneously as an interface of representation of the collective, the individual and the region (internal audiences), fulfilling the expectations and needs of the target public and other stakeholders. Design principles and good practices are also defined to ensure that visual identity continues to function as a cultural interface of the territory in a sustainable logic and not just business requirements.

Keywords: Brand visual identity · Brand of mountain olive oils · Brand mark · Project-grounded research

1 Introduction

Nowadays, efforts to compete and communicate in a global marketplace means creating a brand. However, little data remains on how to create an effective and efficient brand.

For most cases there is a wide range of products and services that compete for a prominent place. In this scenario of large product offering, brand creation has been a way of emphasizing the differentiating characteristics of products or services or its emotional associations. An example of this are the brand portfolios of Consumer

Packaged Goods (CPG), which after decades of unfocused growth had left companies such as H.J. Heinz, Sara Lee, Kraft to financial problems, or Unilever and Procter & Gamble which faced the difficulties and complexity of managing a large number of brands with an international dimension, each with its own local requirements and adaptations needs. In general, these multi-brand strategies tend to increase production and communication costs, the need for new means or channels of communication, slow decision-making, poor circulation of information, the challenges in monitoring the impact of actions according to targets, problems in growing the reputation of each brand and impatience for a return on investment. On the other hand, the proliferation of small brands with low notoriety and without a strong identity easily translates into visual noise. Products with a brand mark (logotype and/or symbol) or visual identity but without a real brand, incapable of generating memorization and emotional attachment in the minds of stakeholders. This is especially the case of micro, small and medium enterprises whom seem to have brand management problems, highlighting problems such as the lack of resident human resources specialized in brand, a low number of media and means of communication, the absence of strategies, the poor knowledge of the target audiences and the actions of competitors, a low annual budget to invest in communication, a disjointed or wrong presence in social networks and digital media or the absence of investment in advertising.

The previous literature tends to consider that only producers, manufacturers and retailers develop brands [1], with little emphasis on brands that build a reputation and sell products they do not produce (called black brands by [2]), barely mention the brands created by cooperation or in communities, particularly rural ones, and the first articles on co-branding date from the mid-1990 s [3]. Most of the literature on place branding refers to countries and large regions or cities, leaving out rural or sparsely populated areas.

In the same sense, publications on Place Branding refer to the efforts of countries, tourism management bodies or municipalities, tending to forget the participation of local communities or private companies in the construction of the “identity of a region” and “regional identity”. The identity of a region is the set of traits and characteristics that distinguish it in geographical and physical, cultural and historical terms, while regional identity refers to institutionalized practices, discourses and symbols that result from social interaction over time and that characterize how people identify with the region [4, 5]. There seems to be the idea that Place Branding positions a region by what it says about itself, forgetting that a place is always judged by what it does over time. But if the notion of a place results from an open system of interdependent, from the action of multiple stakeholders whose action impacts on other community members [6], Branding is a way of relating and combining the interests of various stakeholders and integrating actions [7] and communications according to a purpose, a shared brand vision [8] or a way of relating brand, people and place [9].

As declared by Vuorinen and Vos [10] conceptualizing places as brands have competitive advantages and implications for community and place development (Rannikko 2000). We intend to explain how a brand creation with and for a community of olive oil producers can shape an identity and vision about a region from a local product.

2 The Context of the Brand Mountain Olive Oils

The brand Azeites de Montanha (Mountain Olive Oils) is a result of the research project “Promotion and Valorization of Mountain Olive Oil” promoted by the Castelo Branco Polytechnic Institute and the Guarda Polytechnic Institute, with the Intermunicipal Community of Beiras and Serra da Estrela and the Biotechnology Center of Plants of Beira Interior. The project intended to develop a set of actions to strengthen the positioning of companies in the oil sector in Beiras and Serra da Estrela, through best practices, introducing new methods, techniques and innovative processes leading to differentiated olive oils by their quality and distinct organoleptic characteristics. This region represents the territorial area of more than 6000 km², corresponding to 22% of the central region of the country, including 15 municipalities and 266 civil parishes. In the European Union (EU), Portugal is the second country with the highest number of SMEs per 100 inhabitants and the third largest exporter of olive oil in the European Union.

In Portugal, there are traces of an olive oil culture since the Bronze Age. And in the region of Beiras and Serras da Estrela olive oil has been part of the agricultural activities and the Mediterranean diet for several centuries, with olive oil occupying a relevant position in commerce since the 13th century. Therefore, in the national context, olive oil from the Beiras and Serra da Estrela regions is easily associated with quality olive oil. Nevertheless, olive oil brands from the Alentejo region of Portugal are the reference. In international terms, Portugal is associated with quality olive oil, although a considerable portion of the national olive oil production is sold by Spanish and Italian brands.

In Beiras and Serra da Estrela region, olive oil brands are created by cooperatives of producers, farmers/olive growers, packers, distributors/sellers of olive oil. Most of these brands contribute to the sale of a small annual production, which lasts for several months. Most of these brands are not associated with a marketing strategy defined as such and the visual identity is limited to a Brand Mark and the label. The bottle tends to be chosen exclusively for reasons of price and ease of purchase, normally they adopted unsuitable brand names, there is rarely a packaging or other media and means of communication, particularly stationary, website or advertising. With few exceptions, presence on social networks is done in an amateurish and rather disjointed way, confusing brand communication with the CEO’s discourse and tone or selected images without a graphic and semantic criterion. In market terms, these small producers compete with national brands and the more organized one’s export to various markets although sales are still based on the notoriety built by the experience of the consumer who repeats the purchase and on the word of mouth.

The study was initiated with a non-interventionist methodology, including the review of the literature and methods such as the study of competing brands, audience map and persona method. Next, was adopted an interventionist methodology, specifically, a project-grounded design research, including focus groups and participatory methods to define and test a mountain olive oil brand and its visual identity design.

3 Noninterventionist Research

The brand is essentially a set of intangible concepts that are associated with a place, company, product or service which results from the perception of stakeholders about everything associated with the brand: what the company does, how it communicates, what it says and what values it, what it does, price policies, points of sale, etc.

The brand management process (Branding or brand management) consists of adopting control mechanisms and reformulating the brand or company as an articulated whole (taking into account the desired brand image), that is, forms of monitoring that all points of contact between the brand and the public, proceeding to correct the conduct and communication, whenever necessary [11]. A process to guarantee public awareness and brand dimension, maintain its good reputation and foster customer loyalty [12].

Commercial competition in global market is part of nowadays reality [13] and in this scenario also the territories are in competition [14] in various sizes ranging from producer brands to place brands.

The brand Mountain Olive Oils is associated with the identity of the territory of Beiras and Serra da Estrela, and is inseparable from the brand Portugal, the Mediterranean and Portuguese culture and gastronomy.

The Brand Mountain Olive Oils therefore has the purpose of doing for the producers what they cannot alone: To gain brand reputation on a large scale; Create a brand with added value; Develop a Brand Visual Identity, communicated effectively and consistently in a strategic manner; To value Mountain Olive Oils by their qualities and through the territory; Implement a solid and purposeful advertising campaigns and promotional actions. Ensure brand management in terms of communication effectiveness and according to objectives.

A product with a logo, label and packaging is not a branded product if these are not associated with a Personality and brand concept that is recognized as such by the audience. The brand is always more than the product's characteristics and no company's decision is unrelated to the brand's success.

In concrete terms, was developed a Study of territory and Competitors Maps; a Public Map; a SWOT Analysis; and a Brand Diagnosis. The competitors map is a visual research tool to analyze brand marks and visual identities of competitor brands, in order to detect sector graphic codes, their graphic tones or styles, the brand language and the symbolic positioning of competitors [15].

The main conclusions of the competitors analyzed in the category of extra virgin olive oil are: About 80% of the Brand marks contain gold, yellow and green. However, black is present in almost all; The symbols tend to use the olive, olive leaf, drip of oil and the olive tree itself, with both more geometrical and expressive approaches; There are fewer Brand marks with direct allusion to the mountain; About 20% of the Brand marks analyzed have only a logotype, without a symbol.

To complement the research, the competing brands were positioned between two axes of cross-positioning, in the vertical between traditional and contemporary and horizontally from emotional to rational.

4 Project-Grounded Design Research

The brand definition started with the brand platform, a synthesis of the brand's Identity or DNA (essence, culture, vision and central idea) and its Positioning (affirmation in the market in relation to the expectations of the public and in comparison to the competitors) and according to the brand contract (value proposal).

In parallel, the Brand Personality was defined. Brand Personality is a strategic decision taking into account the place, producers and community identity related to what the market requires in order for such a brand to be clearly differentiated from its competitors and to meet the needs and expectations of the audience (Public Map).

Defining brand personality requires a sense of the desired brand image. Defining the desired Brand Image, namely its values, emotions and main symbolic characteristics capable of establishing the Brand Positioning, first in textual terms and then visually by an Image panel to express sensations, feelings and its brand (Costa 2010). A similar process to the way a fictional character is defined, since the brand is associated with behaviors similar to human beings (Aaker 1997 and Kapferer 2012).

The brand platform and the brand personality will work as a design principle and script for visual identity and brand communication, in strategic, tactical and operational terms, in particular in the communication plan and points of contact: service, sponsorship, advertising, events, name, verbal identity, visual identity, product design, etc. The potential development of a shared brand, by producers and congregation of an identity with community, regional and provincial levels was agreed in public discussions, as a cooperation process or co-creation between various stakeholders. This process allowed to clarify needs, expectations and to conceptualize a common goal, as also the intended brand image for Beiras and Serra da Estrela region, used as key reference for the place branding process as long-term commitment.

In this way, the positioning was defined as a participatory process, reinforcing the identity of the place and strengthening the link between local stakeholders and the brand. We took advantage of rurality, the mountain, the altitude, in sustainable olive groves, taking advantage of the best of traditional cultivars allied to contemporary demands as part of a high-quality olive oil culture. It was considered possible to highlight through the brand Mountain Olive Oils the type of bond, culture, history and know-how of the region with the olive oil. In order to emphasize the quality of the Olive Oil from Beiras and Serra da Estrela, the brand Mountain Olive Oils focuses exclusively on olive oil of superior quality such as Extra Virgin Olive Oil.

The Visual Identity of the brand, as well as the brand language must express the Brand Personality and its positioning. After all, Visual Identity is a way of visualizing intangible concepts about what is the Brand Mountain Olive Oil.

To ensure a greater sense of belonging, empathy and self-identification of olive growers and stakeholders with the brand, three Brand mark options were designed, each one corresponding to different expressions of the Brand Personality. The selection of Brand mark was made using different processes, namely through a questionnaire, in public discussions and through Focus Groups.

The questionnaire was applied via Internet and in person to consumers with a sample of 30 respondents and to olive growers and farmers, with a sample of 33

respondents, allowing to exclude the Brand mark with the worst results or lack of association with Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Mountain Olive Oil, Beiras e Serra da Estrela, High and Medium High Quality and High Average Price.

Considering the two remaining Brand mark, Focus Groups were performed to identify secondary associations and to characterize the perception of value in relation to the positioning and initial premises. In this regard Lupton [16] stated that the easiest way to test the effectiveness of design is to ask the target audience, considering that Focus Groups can be used to generate ideas or evaluate proposals through organized conversations and with questions prepared in advance.

Three Focus Groups were held, each with distinct groups of six to eight participants. The first group with six olive growers, farmers, packers, olive oil distributors/resellers (three women and three men aged between 25 and 80); the second with seven specialists in Marketing, Design and Brand Communication and business associations (three women and four men aged between 30 and 65); and the third with eight consumers (five women and three men aged between 20 and 70). All focus groups were conducted by external specialists, which registered the process in video and complemented the data with questionnaires, as well as final reports of each Focus Groups. To organize each Focus Group, desks were arranged in a U-shaped format and began with a brief contextualization of the Mountain Olive Oils brand and the main features identified in the Brand Book and Graphic Standards Kit. A set of exercises was applied that work like open diagrams with a voting system to detect trends for each possibility: Exercise 1—Emotional Archetypes of the brand; Exercise 2—Uses for olive oil; Exercise 3—Attributes and Benefits of olive oil; Exercise 4—Importance of label information.

The final Brand mark was registered at an international level and criteria for awarding the brand Mountain Olive Oils were defined, a slogan was created, and a label and seal were designed. It was designed a common brand label for olive oil producers, increasing brand awareness and dimension. In addition, it allows the producer to be identified with or without his own brand. An alternative is to include a brand stamp in a preexisting label, for those who already have their own brand with some reputation, obtaining added value by the association to the Mountain Olive Oils Brand.

In order to ensure a coherent and efficient brand communication, were developed a Brand Book, a Graphic Standards Manual and a Graphic Standards. In addition, associated to the Brand Book, the Brand Video was developed, which aims to present the brand as an aggregating concept and interface between the region and the various audiences. In the same sense, the Brand Management and Use Video and the Brand Management and Use Manual for Mountain Olive Oils were made.

5 Results and Findings

The brand Mountain Olive Oils corresponds to the identity of the territory and meets the needs of farmers, olive growers, packers and associations in the Beiras and Serra da Estrela region. Not only does the brand Mountain Olive Oils meet the requirements to achieve visibility, notoriety and competitiveness as well it is associated with high-quality

product, specifically Extra Virgin Olive Oil, produced in the region of Beiras and Serra da Estrela, positioned according to the demands of consumers and contemporary stakeholders. The tools and guidelines for the success of the brand Mountain Olive Oils are available and at the service of the Beiras and Serra da Estrela region.

The visual identity of the mountain olive oils brand acts simultaneously as an interface of representation of the collective, the individual and the region and fulfils the expectations and needs of the target public and other stakeholders. In addition, the implemented design principles and guidance of good practices ensure that visual identity continues to function as a cultural interface of the territory in a sustainable logic and not just serving financial interests. It has been possible to develop a visual brand identity common to local olive growers and other olive oil brand sellers as a single community, acting as place brand. The brands associated with the territory have the potential to foster the cohesion of the place and to bring together individual efforts so that they have more impact with the public. To do so, the brand must be a mobilizer of wills around a vision, that is, the brand must belong to the people of the region and managed in a way that captivates investors and consumers.

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