Applying archetypal frameworks to brand identity & packaging research Marcie Connan & Crystal Sarantoulias

Authors: Marcie Connan, VP, Research marcie@diginsights.com,

+1 (647) 293 4207

Crystal Sarantoulias, Research Associate crystal@diginsights.com,

+1 (647) 278 9443

www.diginsights.com

Client: National Mass-merchant Retailer, tools

Research objectives

This research project was designed to guide the visual identity and packaging design for a leading brand of home repair and maintenance tools. While the brand is an established player in the market, the project team was concerned that it had lost resonance with consumers on a deeper level as the category became increasingly crowded with competitive launches. Given the product would receive little in the way of advertising support, the visual design cues employed were pivotal in communicating the brand story through colour, logo treatment and on-package symbols.

The overarching objective of the research was to identify a package design for Brand X[1] that would stand out on shelf, communicate a relevant rational and emotional message, and drive purchase consideration. More specifically, the objectives were to:

- Identify the archetype embodied by the brand's existing visual identity and package design;
- Explore options to shift the brand to a more favourable archetype and positioning by testing several new variations of the visual identity and package design;
- Understand what the package communicated in terms of features and benefits.

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[1] Brand name non-disclosable due to confidentiality reasons.
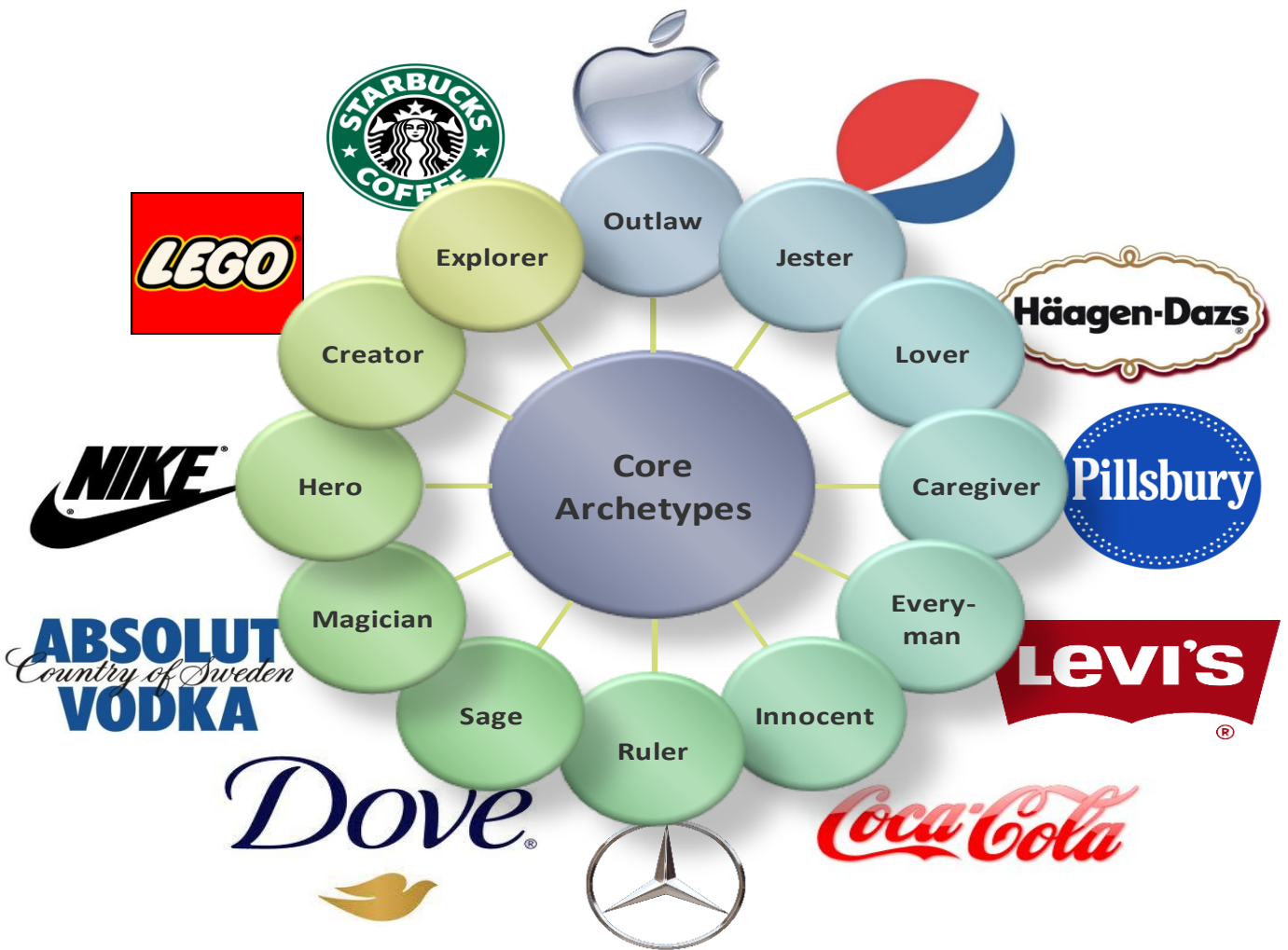
Conceptual framework & research methodology

Brands are stories. The premise behind the use of archetypes in market research is that consumers choose brands in part because they help them to tell stories about themselves, while some chose to buy brands that tell others a story about how the consumer wants to be seen. Brands are a complex system of symbols that fulfill consumer's desires for an intangible experience beyond the tangible product benefit (Oswald 1996). Archetypal characters are the basic building blocks of these stories.

When working with archetypes, DIG Insights leverages the twelve archetypes from the book "The Hero and the Outlaw: Building Extraordinary Brands Through the Power of Archetypes". DIG Insights has collected archetype data on more than 35 different brands and has been able to demonstrate the difference between a well-communicated brand story (where the brand and the consumer archetypes are aligned) and a poorly-communicated brand story (where they are not) and how this impacts the brand's overall perception.

Each of the brands shown to the right communicates a clear brand story through a defined archetype. For example, Apple communicates the Outlaw archetype because it is seen as a radical brand that likes to reinvent things and break the rules established by less revolutionary brands. Nike is the Hero archetype which communicates that the consumer would feel confident, competitive and brave when wearing Nike clothing.

Advertisers work to develop communication strategies that instill a sense of connection between a brand and its target consumer group (Pinson, 1998). Marketers and brand stewards are challenged to design products, packaging and marketing strategies that speak to the unmet needs of their consumers. There are, however, a number of different, often implicit, symbolic relationships between products and their consumers, making the task of reinvention a challenge. Archetypes can provide marketers with a framework from which to assess the 'fit' of these communication elements with the intended brand identity.

The research was conducted online among a national sample of 2,340 adult Canadians who were actively seeking for tools, intended for home use. In total, eight different product & package designs were tested, including the incumbent Brand X package and competitive designs.

Core
Archetypes

Outlaw

Jester

Lover

Caregiver

Every-
man

Innocent

Ruler

Sage

Magician

Hero

Creator

Explorer

The research employed a blind, monadic evaluation of each concept, with ~300 unique evaluations per concept. Respondents evaluated the concepts in terms of breakthrough on-shelf, appeal, perceived advantage, purchase likelihood, and fit with brand expectations. In determining the identity and character of Brand X, a series of profiling questions were included to gauge brand archetype perceptions (how consumers perceive the brand), and to determine consumer archetype perceptions (who consumers think buys the brand). This allowed us to narrow in on communication opportunities and identify designs which supported a rich brand story.

Research outcomes

Our research revealed the incumbent design was positioning Brand X as the friendly, down-to-earth Everyman archetype among the target consumers. Although aligned with the brand's heritage as an approachable product for light to medium do-it-yourselfers, the brand skewed toward the negative expression of this character: plain, boring, a follower, and less expressive, confident and thoughtful than its competitive set.

The research identified an opportunity to shift the brand character toward more ego-driven archetypes: the Ruler (mastery & standards), the Sage (teaching) and the Hero (quest & success), with little risk of alienating the core customers. These alternative archetypes proved to be better aligned with how consumers saw themselves in the realm of the do-it-yourself category, driving improved brand relevance and engagement. Importantly, the research allowed the Marketing team to understand which colours, visual cues and design treatments were important in communicating these archetypal identities, and how they might translate the brand archetype across various consumer touch-points.

Managerial implications

Quite often, market research is conducted in established and hyper-competitive categories, where products cannot sustainably differentiate themselves on features and price alone. Building brand stories around archetypes allows advertisers to imply rather than assert claims (Geis, 1982). This semiotic approach to brand identity research and strategy may provide marketers with a means for clarifying the competitive differences between brands, identifying their consumers' unmet emotional needs, and developing tactics that support consumer perceptions of a brand's value and associations. Identifying an archetype that is aligned with how consumers view themselves in a category creates opportunities for connecting both with irrational and rational choice-drivers, while yielding a platform for shaping a consistent, impactful brand identity.

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Semiomarketing and Fashion Semiology: the business language of Fashion and Luxury

Cinzia Ligas & Fausto Crepaldi

Cinzia Ligas (Istituto Marangoni, Fashion Design, Paris, cinzialigas@semiosis.it), Semiotician, and Fausto Crepaldi (Istituto Marangoni, Fashion Design, Paris, faustoportatile@hotmail.it), Digital Media Director, are among the foremost experts in Italy in luxury communication. They are consultants in semiomarketing, fashion semiology, fashion video advertising and virtual fashion, and lecturers at various prestigious University institutes, such as IESEG, IED, Domus Academy, Style and Design College, University of Bologna.

What is the mission of Fashion Semiology?

Fashion Semiology helps to understand and learn how to use the secret language of luxury objects, fashion clothing and accessories; a language of forms, symbols, icons, codes and colours, which has subconscious effects on the perception, attitude and purchasing desire of the target. Semiomarketing is the branch of marketing originating in the application of semiotic survey to market research, a methodology based on the polysemantic analysis, decomposition and recomposition of verbal and visual texts (advertising, internal communication, Web), while analyzing consumer profiles and expectations. Its aim is to optimize the communication/sales processes.

Perception: The 8th P

An effective business communication plan is typically based on the balanced management of Product, Place, Price and Promotion (complemented, according to the latest marketing mix theories, by People, Process and Physical evidence), without neglecting the fact that marketing is nowadays increasingly underpinned by an eighth P, which permeates the other 7: Perception (Figure 1).
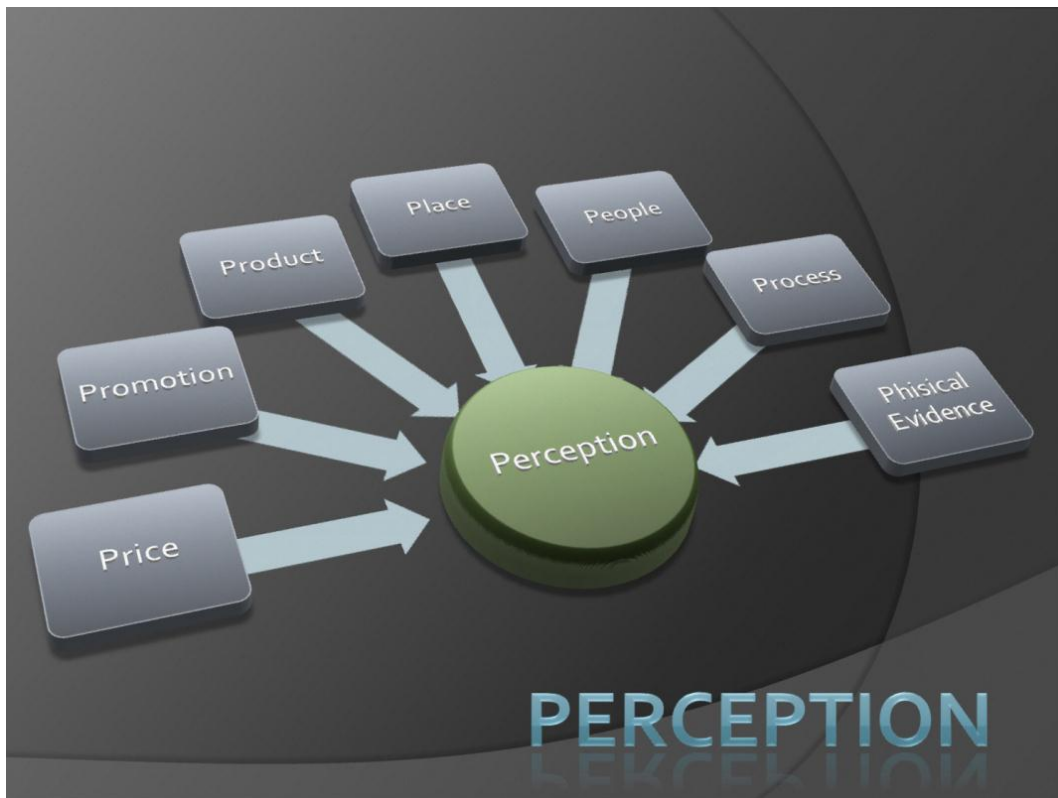

Fig.1. Perception: The 8th P.

Putting the analytical features of semiotics together with the pragmatic features of marketing, the aim of semiomarketing is equivalent to a Business Communication Optimization (also known as BCO) process, through all those activities that aim at augmenting the target-client conversion rate or the rate of customer loyalty through specific B2C or B2B strategies.

BCO acts on the visual, textual morphological elements, on clothing or staff gestures, on product layout and presentation and on other elements affecting human perception, amplifies and optimizes them, and ensures that whatever emanates from a particular brand (product, press campaign, fair stand design, digital or video advertising communication strategy) is semiomarketing-oriented, in other words, capable of generating in consumers an idea of positivity, convenience, authenticity, professionalism, reliability, with view to effectively communicating corporate values and engendering business growth and customer loyalty.

How does Semiomarketing work?

Practically, through the use of codes, symbols, icons, discourse categories, and semiotic frames, semiomarketing elaborates various luxury and fashion video and advertising, semiotic-communicative structures that are marketing oriented, aimed at optimizing business communications in order to improve the target-client conversion process, a magic moment in corporate life, without which the company no longer sells and, with time, ceases to exist.

Semiomarketing de-composes and re-composes written and visual communication in a modular manner using sophisticated analysis techniques, such as **art semiology** (for a marketing oriented visual communication), **logosemiotics** (for a marketing oriented verbal and written communication), **warpframe** (for a marketing oriented video communication) and **net semiology** (for a marketing oriented web project) and through scientific and cognitive instruments, such as **extrabrand**, (for the extrapolation, the creation end the re-positioning of brands), and **sintext**, (for digital synthetic and SEO - Search Engine Optimization - oriented writing, with a highly evocative value) that are more flexible and far-reaching than conventional communication and marketing theories.

Semiomarketing is the fast track for optimizing the target-client conversion rate and customer loyalty. Fashion Semiology is its stylistic, communicational and marketing-oriented interpretation in the world of High Fashion and Luxury. For instance, the window of a department store is the medium par excellence to place brands and products on display. A series of interrelated codes are applied in this space. Fashion Semiology techniques are very often used by fashion and luxury brands for their advertising, including Dolce and Gabbana, Fendi and Gucci.

Case-study: application of warp frame

A very interesting fashion semiology tool is the 'warpframe'. The term warpframe is made up of warp and frame and refers to all those visual and conceptual communication techniques that act in depth within a video narration, and whose stories they support.

Just like a tambour, in order to have a fabric, you need the threads of the warp to be weaved with those of the plot, and likewise the creation of an advertising video results in an emotional response, while infusing in the minds of the addressees certain desires. The purpose is the generation of unconscious associations, which require deep perceptive and narrative structures.

Warpframe, a semiomarketing technique used to optimize business video communication, is made up of ten items that have to be taken into account before producing the storyboard or writing the script, as follows:

Identity determines the role that the issuer wants to play in the communication flux regarding the addressee.

Relationship establishes the kind of relationship between issuer and addressee in order to reach the goal intended by the video.

Style puts the communication in the proper style in order to convey the chosen identity and relationships.

Signs indicate the symbols, icons or indexes necessary to reach the goal.

Codes indicate what mimetic, proxemic, kinetic or other elements are necessary to insert in order to reach the video's goal.

Figures concern the visual rhetoric figures that suit the story, in order to stimulate a positive feedback.

Roots concern the archetypical models that must be inserted in each story to make it more effective, while appealing to a collective unconscious.

Roles are about actantial models that must be used in order to structure the story in such a manner as to be involving for the audience.

Balance represents forces that give dynamism to the story through the construction of balances between the different actants, that imply elements of contradiction, contrariety and complementarity.

Sub-limen concerns down deep messages, visual and textual, made of inferences, denotations and connotations, preconceptions that influence deeply the perception of the video by its target.

An interesting case of warprame in action is the advertising of Regina (a brand of toilet paper) realized in Los Angeles by the agency Saatchi & Saatchi, under the direction of Raul Garcia, with the animations of Secret Plan.
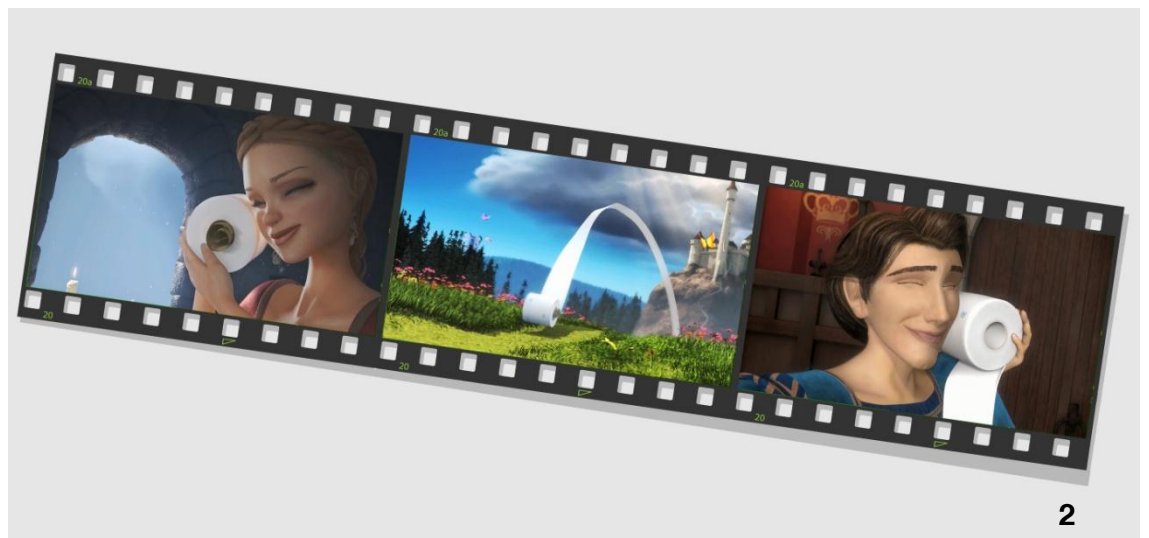

Fig.2. Frames from Regina advertising.

The warpframe structure of the video is as follows:

Identity

The issuer, the brand "Regina", is the protagonist, represented by the icon of the paper roll that develops all the way through the story. What is underlined here is the constant presence of the issuer, not only as portrayed in the advertising, but during the entire user's life.

Relationship

The relationship between issuer (Regina) and addressee (public) is confidential and smooth styled. The communicative style was studied to be similar to that of a fairy tale, but also ironic, polite and tactful.

Signs

The paper roll is the symbol of the brand, and an icon of softness. The prince embodies the end client, while princess Rapunzel with her long plaits (not as long as the paper roll, though) embodies Regina's competitors. Butterflies are icons of lightness, the squirrel of agility, the owl of knowledge (knowledge acquired by the company over the years), while at the same time recalling the night atmosphere that surrounds the castle of the old witch, where the princess is imprisoned. The message that Rapunzel puts inside the paper roll is a symbol of the other toilet papers produced by the competitors, too short and rough (discarded by the prince/client that prefers Regina toilet paper).

Codes

The codes of clothing and architecture (castles) lets us know that the two subjects are a prince and a princess. Gesture and mimetic codes both make us feel the softness of Regina toilet paper. Kinetic codes were studied in order to underline these features (the toilet paper jumps, bounces, bends, envelops, gets stretched for days and days - represented by the moon and the sun - as if it would never stop, until reaching the prince).

Figures

Hyperboles were introduced (a never-ending toilet paper) always present like trademarks of the products, as well as comparisons (Regina toilet paper is longer than Rapunzel's plaits that embody the competitors) and softer than the paper she sends to the prince and inserts inside the Regina's paper roll.

Roots

The archetype of the wandered was used, embodied by the toilet paper roll that wanders to reach the prince's castle. Even the archetypical figure of the secret message was used.

Roles

The subject is the princess (competitor) that wants to reach the prince (client) to offer him her paper (the secret message) inserted in a "magic" roll of toilet paper (helper). The opponent is the distance from the prince's castle and naturally her being imprisoned in a place that cannot be reached. The issuer is the Regina brand, while the addressee is the target-audience.

Balance

There are forces that confer dynamism to the story through the construction of a balance between the different actants, but also contradiction, contrariety and complementarity. The following forces are present:

long/short and **not long/not short:**

long

- Regina paper roll

short

- secret message written on a piece of paper

not short

- the long and winding road

not long

- the waiting of the prince

It is obvious that the paper roll (long) is an idea that is complementary to non short (the road), contrary to short (the message that symbolizes other paper rolls) and in contradiction to not long (the waiting of the prince/client for the Regina paper roll to become part of his life).

Sub-limen

It is one of those deep visual messages that influence the perception of the video by the public. Here we have the preconceptions: the meaning of the video is fully understood by those who know the fairy tale of princess Rapunzel. There are various references to fairy tales: The Sword in the stone, Bambi, the Frog Prince. The magical value of Regina paper is also underlined by making the water lily bloom and shine after being touched, as if it had been touched by a magic wand.

Shapes, at a perceptual level, convey ideas of softness (the curvy bouncing of the paper, underlined by the curvy bridge and the wings of the butterflies), but together with sensation of sturdiness determined by straight lines (the sword in the stone, that also recalls another middle age story; the tower where the princess is imprisoned, the candle on the window).

Fashion Semiology represents a method for evoking in targets, in a modern manner and with a language tailored to the new digital mass media, the emotions produced by the refined and sophisticated world of Fashion and Luxury.

Contact information

journalmarketingsemiotics@yahoo.com , **grosolatos123@myway.com**

Contact address

University of Kassel

Department of English

c/o George Rossolatos

Mönchebergstraße 19

34109 Kassel

Germany

International
Journal of
Marketing
Semiotics