

## **COLLECTIVE BRAND IMAGERY WEAVE: CONNECTING BRAND VALUES TO PRODUCT CHARACTERISTICS USING PHYSICAL COMPLEX INSTALLATION**

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### **Abstract**

Branding is almost fully embedded as a strategic asset. Companies must develop products with designs that not only appear attractive but also carry distinctive references, manifest in the values of the brand. However, those values are sometimes intangible and evoke different meaning between consumers. Therefore it is a challenging job to manipulate design features to elicit the ‘right’ associations, especially for novice designers. This paper discusses a workshop where we implemented a method based on the collective imagery framework to explore seven values (prestige, superior, quality, excitement, audacious, performance, simplicity). The method establishes an embodied common ground for co-designers to envision, enact and connect the complex network, which connects brand values to product characteristics. In the workshop participants were asked to create visions with each other by sharing personal stories. The physical structure built by participants to show their values in spatial structure. We conclude that it is useful to use physical installation to determine meanings of values that inform product characteristic for a brand to be recognisable.

**Keywords:** Product architecture, Co-design, Design methods, Brand design, Product-service systems (PSS)

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# 1 INDIVIDUALITY IN BRAND VALUE

Brand values are commonly used to express brand identity and to evoke its associations to product characteristics. The main activity to design for a brand is to find associations between the meanings of brand values to design characteristics of the products. Some of these associations are explicit, such as the ‘angularity’ of a product; while some are implicit – for example values such as ‘prestige’ or ‘simplicity’ (Karjalainen 2004). Brand values are crucial for a company to build their corporate reputation and to develop a strong brand. They are however, difficult to define due to differences in meanings interpreted by individuals. It is therefore crucial to identify individuality in brand value by interpreted meanings and translate them into design characteristics so the designed product will evoke the ‘right’ associations to brand identity. However, this process is challenging for novice designers.

## 1.1 Shared Frame of reference

Crilly et al. (2004) posit that every consumer experiences products differently when connecting meanings to characteristics as they react to products in cognitive, affective and behavioural responses. Figure 1 depicts their model in describing consumer’s process of product observation and related emotions. The cognitive part is divided into the aesthetic impression of the product - whether consumers like it or not; the semantic interpretation - will the product fulfil their basic needs; and the symbolic association - what does the product meant to consumers and their environment.

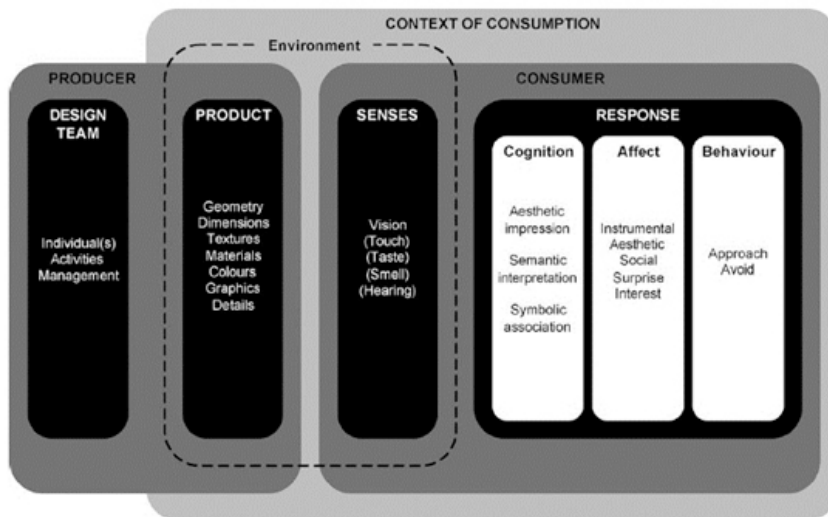


Figure 1. Frame of Reference Model (Crilly et al. 2004)

What really goes on when a consumer experiences products, can be more complex than the model (Figure 1). The reason lies in that consumers observe products through their own ‘glasses’ referring to own experiences, knowledge and culture (Burdek 1996, Desmet and Hekkert 2007, Crilly, Good et al. 2008), which we call ‘frame of reference’. It is constructed throughout the consumer’s life and therefore can be different from one to another. It can take the form of general collective knowledge which is similar to others; or a personal experience which can be evoked by certain product characteristics (Barthes 1994).



Figure 2. Two different designs of motorcycles which will evoke different associations

Figure 2 shows two different motorcycles. One can argue that consumers have the ability to indicate the left motorcycle as more dynamic compared to the right one, as a result of experiencing all the specific design characteristics together in the complete product. This refers to a more collective knowledge when observing the specific characteristics of the product. On the other hand some consumers will know the left motorcycle is a Ducati, because of their own personal experience with the product. They know that Ducati is familiar for their high performance motorcycles characterized by large capacity four-stroke, 90° V-twin engines, with a desmodromic valve design.

The difficulty in successful branding is therefore in the personal associations that relate brand values to product characteristics. Therefore, it is more effective to design products which instead refer to consumer's *general knowledge part* of their frame of reference (Crilly, Good et al. 2008). So more consumers are likely to recognise and understand the product. In this way the company reduces risk to introduce products that evoke a meaning that is too complex for consumers.

## 1.2 Brand Value in Product Characteristics

Value has a broad definition and is domain specific. As ethical explanation in psychology, values are principles to define right, good and just; which we use to determine right versus wrong, good versus bad (Navran 2010). Brand value is specifically oriented towards products. Kotler (2000) defines brand values as a ratio between what the customer gets and gives, in terms of benefits and assumes costs (Figure 3). It is also a psychological identification customer obtains after the purchase of a branded product. A product is successful only when it delivers value and satisfaction to the customer. Consequently a company needs to define themselves with brand values that emphasise their functional and emotional benefits of their brand in comparison to their competitors.

$$\text{Value} = \frac{\text{Benefits}}{\text{Costs}} = \frac{\text{Functional benefits} + \text{emotional benefits}}{\text{Monetary costs} + \text{time costs} + \text{energy costs} + \text{psychic costs}}$$

Figure 3. Equation of value (Kotler 2000)

The challenge for brand design is in making brand values more explicit through product characteristics. Products with a strong visual identity that creates value provides the most important mediums for brand recognition (Borja de Mozota 2004). To understand how important product characteristics are, we adopt the model of semantic transformation which distinguishes implicit design cues from explicit ones (Karjalainen and Snelders 2010). Not only that implicit cue can be subjective, we are yet to know how implicit cue is connected to explicit cue. Furthermore there is a difference in experiencing implicit cues in brand values in reference to consumer's frame of reference. A successful brand design requires a connection between the implicit brand values to explicit product design characteristics.

## 2 COLLECTIVE IMAGERY WEAVE FOR BRANDING

There is currently no design tool or method that support designers in dividing the frame of reference into the general and specific parts, or to manipulate design features to elicit the "right" associations to brand values. So a tool or method is needed for designers to envision collaboratively on brand values, their meanings and their relations to product features. In order to connect the implicit brand value to define explicit product characteristics, we adapted a well practised workshop method developed by second author (Chueng-Nainby 2014, Chueng-Nainby, Fassi et al. 2014, Chueng-Nainby 2015, Preez, Cilliers et al. 2015) based on collective imagery framework (Chueng-Nainby and Gong 2013). The goal of the adapted workshop is to identify this general knowledge part of consumers by constructing a shared vision among designers. Thereafter those general value descriptions need to be translated to specific product characteristics (Mulder-Nijkamp and Eggink 2013). The method used in the workshop establishes an embodied common ground for co-designers to collectively envision and enact the complexity of design values to design characteristics to form brand identity of a product.

### 2.1 Collective Imagery Framework

The collective imagery framework works on the externalisation of individual creative imagery in sharing with others (Chueng-Nainby 2010, Chueng-Nainby and Gong 2013). The shared collective imagery is a creative concept structure that represents community's shared design space of which

connections of ideas are made possible through spatial activities of deconstruction, construction and reconstruction. The structural connectedness of ideas and data give rise to the creative emergence of a design concept. It is a theoretical framework informed by practice based research to extend Finke's (1995) work on preinventive structures of creative imagery as divergent insight that drives creativity. It works to overcome individuality in creative processes. The designers generate design elements in keywords or drawings such as ideas in visuals or words into narratives or stories. The stories are structured into a physical installation, which forms a common ground for creative understanding. This is potentially useful to find general alignment on the frame of reference between different designers .

## **2.2 Value Structuring with Storytelling**

Storytelling and narrative processing are widely used in brand design (Escalas 2004, Wolstonholme 2008, Woodside, S. et al. 2008). Brand companies often use stories that are easily recognised by consumers. Stories can be used as value structuring tool to extend abstract concepts of brand values while constructing concrete product characteristics. Suitably in the collective imagery framework, a story is a system (sequential or not) of interconnected narratives. With this, we can build structures from stories of values by linking elements (design possibilities) in an abductive way through storytelling. The resulted structure becomes a sort of value structure, and it can be explicitly visual and physical.

## **3 COLLECTIVE BRAND IMAGERY WEAVE WORKSHOP**

This paper reports what we term a collective brand imagery workshop as an adaptation of the collective imagery framework and workshop method by second author for brand design to link brand value to product characteristics through storytelling. (Chueng-Nainby and Gong 2013, Chueng-Nainby 2014, Chueng-Nainby, Fassi et al. 2014, Chueng-Nainby 2015, Preez, Cilliers et al. 2015) The workshop was collaboratively designed by both authors and facilitated by first author to identify the possibility of a physical value-structuring tool for the purpose of teaching brand design. The workshop is experimental to address the following research questions:

1. Can we identify meanings of brand values through narrative processing?
2. Can we collaboratively evaluate a general 'frame of reference'?
3. Can brand value be structured physically to represent the meanings and associations?

To address these questions, prior to this workshop, participants were asked to make a brand extension on a well-known brand of their choice such as Ferrari. During the workshop, participants explored values by thinking of their personal stories and share them as individual perspectives in groups. They would define a frame of reference by collecting stories on both general and personal parts of the most important value. Through working on a physical installation, they visualised connections of these stories and design elements to form a value structure of common understanding on brand values and their meanings. Adopting the practice-based interventionist approach, we collected and analysed the results based on photo and video materials. We also evaluated the workshop with the participants.

### **3.1 Workshop Process**

The collective brand imagery weave workshop consists of three situated phases: value exploration, value evaluation and value creation; implemented using various techniques within the collective imagery framework (Table 1). The process is iterative and each phase can be repeated depending on the situation. We began by asking seven groups of four designers to describe a value they would like to investigate. Figure 4 and Table 1 depicts an overview of the different phases in the workshop.

The value exploration phase was carried out to gain more insight on the chosen value. During the first cycle (cycle 1a and 1b of Table 1), participants were asked to intuitively generate keyword tags to questions such as "describe a product that evokes the value" or "describe associations with the value". Subsequently they were asked to form a story by choosing five keywords and thread them onto a bamboo stick that we called a narrative stick. Pictures in the forms of printed photos were used to generate a more visually oriented narrative stick during second step of first cycle.

Narratives were formed in responding to questions such as "Describe a positive experience connected to the value" or "Describe an activity that connected to the value". They repeat these two steps for another cycle (2a and 2b). Each cycle ended with a value evaluation session, where participants summarised their findings using storytelling, and evaluated by the other participants to come to a

consensus on their collective ‘frame of reference’. After these two cycles of value exploration and evaluation, participants constructed a physical structure using the earlier generated narrative sticks, rubber band, metal wire, and wool threads. They were asked to conceive form and structure which resembled their chosen brand value by translating aspects of the brand (in this case stories of value and meanings) into a physical form (which can become product characteristics).



Figure 4. Collective Brand Imagery Workshop Flow

In the workshop they thus translate the more implicit definitions of their value (like prestige) in the form of stories and meanings to more explicit oriented forms (angular lines). By translating the value of the brand first to the stories and subsequently to the structure they become more aware of the important aspects of the value and can make a better connection.

Table 1. Workshop Summary

Phases	Activities	Props	Technique used
Value Exploration	Cycle 1a	Keyword Tags	Word Imagery Narrative stick
	Cycle 1b	Visual Tags Photos	Visual Imagery Narrative stick
Value Evaluation	Defining frame of reference	Whiteboard	Storytelling Collective Crit
Value Exploration	Cycle 2a	Keyword Tags	Word Imagery Narrative stick
	Cycle 2b	Visual Tags Photos	Visual Imagery Narrative stick
Value Evaluation	Defining frame of reference	Whiteboard	Storytelling Collective Crit
Value Creation	Constructing physical model of narrative structure	Narrative stick, metal and wool threads.	Value structuring through imagery

## 4 RESULTS

The outcomes from the workshop as an indication on the research questions are drawn from both observations and interpretations on the workshop experience and the resulted physical installations. First research question addresses the effect of narrative processing in the form of storytelling by using the value structuring tool to identify meanings in relation to brand values. Seven physical structures were constructed during the workshop. They are structures to represent the values *prestige*, *performance*, *excitement*, *audacious*, *simplicity*, *superior* and *quality*.

The participants informed that they were able to clearly define the meaning of brand values by sharing stories with group members, which answers to first research question. It also established a common ground as some form of collective imagery among participants to understand emotional meaning of particular value as further input on their design. However, some participants expressed that they found difficulty to relate to the brand through personal stories, in particularly when choosing pictures to tell personal stories that are real. A possible reason is that every participant received a same set of images and therefore unlikely to find unique pictures to form story to connect to a personal level.

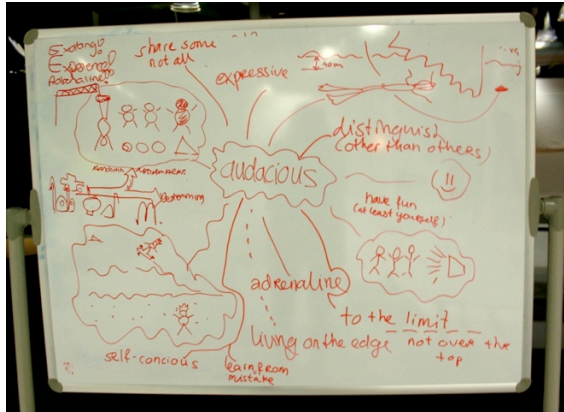


Figure 5. Evaluating 'audacious'



Figure 6. Evaluating 'excitement'

During value evaluation, every participant used their personal stories to explain meaning of the brand with some chose to draw their stories on the whiteboard. Bottom left corner of whiteboard in Figure 5 shows a drawing of a participant feeling audacious during a vacation in Africa when he learned to surf. Participants used a whiteboard to explain their results to each other. The terms that were mentioned more often were seen as more general in terms of the frame of reference. Figure 6 show that keywords with bigger writing with thicker ink indicate values with more importance. Those words were mentioned more often and therefore form a part of the general frame of reference. Although this method gave participants more insight in the important aspects of the brand, it was still hard to distinguish the differences between the general and personal keywords as a result of having only two rounds due to time issues. The outcomes would be better when we perform the same process several times, to collect a broader view of different designers. Nevertheless, the important thing achieved during the value evaluation was the common ground between the designers, which answers to the second research question.

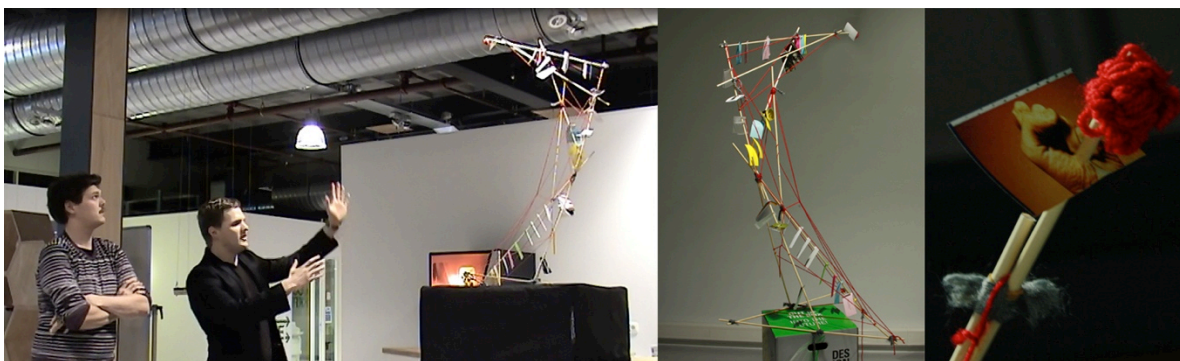


Figure 7. Physical structure on the value 'prestige'

The workshop ended with groups presenting alongside their structural installation. Figure 7 shows a physical structure that symbolizes the value 'prestige' created using angular lines and shapes. It was deliberately placed on a platform so audience viewed the structure from beneath in a frog perspective. The group also adapted the metaphor of a scorpion with a stinging tail to express the power and symbolize best quality. A picture of a fist is placed at the end of the tail to symbolise power and extremeness of the brand. As can be seen in the picture, the participants of the 'prestige' group also presented using body movement to indicate the movement to the top as the core of the value.

Figure 8 shows three value structures that symbolised values prestige, simplicity and performance. The distinction in each structure indicates that brand value informs the form of value structure built in physical installation. The distinction in forms and meanings of the structures suggest a positive indication for the third research question. We have described the form of the value prestige at previous section. The structure of the value ‘simplicity’ shows a circle; which the participants the most simple form, which is a circle. Creator of this structure explained that the use of grey wool to cover the metal shows simplicity could be the outer display of sophisticated technology that is hidden.



Figure 8. Structures of the values prestige, simplicity and performance

The structure that symbolises ‘performance’ uses a triangle form, which is the strongest shape to emphasize stability. An inner triangle symbolises the majority of products and a larger triangle symbolizing the best products. The products on top are differentiated from the rest. These students also thought about the importance of the aspects of the value. They described the structure as: “*The broad core of the idea is inside the pyramid, what rises above is the most important part and is about getting to the top and dreaming about the goal you want to reach*”. Direct associations are placed at inner triangle while abstract associations for value are placed on the top. They complete the structure with a picture of a man climbing a ladder, which emphasize the improvement of performance. The evaluation of all the different stories to identify the general knowledge part of the participants was more difficult. We saw that the groups shared a lot of different stories with each other, but organising those stories into parts that are more general and parts that are more personal oriented was difficult.

## 5 DISCUSSION

The research questions we formed at the beginning of this paper are now evaluated on a more profound level. The first research question addresses the effect of narrative processing in the form of storytelling by using the value structuring tool to identify meanings in relation to brand values. We can say that the method of storytelling forms a good way to interact with each other and to get a better understanding of the different perspectives of a certain brand value. The creation of stories leads to connections with the value that can be remembered more easily and can form a strong shared vision through imageries among the designers. Although in the end we see that discussing the results of two different groups together helped them in becoming more aware of the most important aspects of the value. To give a clear answer on the last question “Can brand value be structured physically to represent the meanings and associations? We first have to analyse the results of the physical structures. There were seven structures resulted from the workshop. We observed three types of translations from values to forms by analysing pictures and videos taken from the workshop. The first type of translation uses basic forms and shapes such as lines, circles, and triangles. Three groups (simplicity, performance and quality) depict these forms. For example, the ‘simplicity’ group uses a circle to emphasize the strength of the value; while the ‘Performance’ group uses triangle. The second pattern of translation of

brand values proposed some forms of archetype besides using the product characteristics. The ‘superior’ group constructed a diamond shape while the ‘prestige’ group constructed a scorpion. The third pattern of translation uses stories to embed meaning to brand values. The ‘excitement’ group performed a sketch about excitement where one of the group members was attacked by a structure that was really abnormal. It shows that the actual story was more important than the creation of the value into physical forms. The creation of the physical structures leads to three different translations to connect the more implicit values to explicit product characteristics.

It is hard to say whether this form of creating the physical structures (with rubber band, metal wire, and wool threads) is the best one. The more important implication we learn from the previously discussed results is the fact that the participants are really involved in building something *physical* to gain insight in the creation of the value. They are actually creating something with their hands that has to resemble the value and therefore think about the actual connection between the stories and the more explicit forms. In the final presentations we saw that the participants really used the structures to explain their stories and almost naturally connected the values to the stories and the physical features.

## 6 CONCLUSION

The embodied and co-design tools introduced at the collective brand imagery weave workshop have successfully supported designers by the establishment of a common ground for them to share knowledge on brand values, which create a better understanding of related emotions. The use of storytelling in particular helped participants to reveal the complexity in the value and gained insight on the general ‘frame of reference’. Consequently, participants need to talk about the meaning of the value and the importance of the different aspects. Creating a physical structure of the value affords participant in making a connection between abstract brand values into their translations in a concrete form. The participants were forced to translate their knowledge into a physical construction. By doing so, they need to think about the actual translation of the brand into physical forms/features.

As a conclusion, the workshop shows successful adaptation of the collective imagery framework as brand design tool that translates brand values into forms. Five out of the seven groups were able to translate the value they investigated into product characteristics. Those groups used characteristics lines and forms to explain their creation of the value. Besides, the ‘prestige’ and the ‘superior’ group added an archetype to make a better connection with the product characteristics and the story behind. As also discussed by Woodside (2008), the use of archetypes in branding helps brand recognition through strong visual brand identity.

Unfortunately, the ‘Excitement’ and the ‘audacious’ groups were focusing more on the process instead of product characteristics. The explanation for this could be that those values are more abstract and focus more on an emotion that is difficult to explain in product characteristics. In those cases it was hard to translate them in product characteristics, but the use of a sketch explained the meaning of the value. We suggest further research to be elaborated on brand values that are closer to emotions. To summarize the method establishes an embodied common ground for co-designers to collectively envision, enact and therefore connect the complexity of design values to design characteristics to form brand identity of a product.

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