FOUNDATIONS OF A VISUAL TOOL FOR BRAND IDENTITY

Research in Progress

Elikan, Dina, Faculty of Business and Economics (HEC), University of Lausanne, 1015 Lausanne, Switzerland, dina.elikan@unil.ch

Pigneur, Yves, Faculty of Business and Economics (HEC), University of Lausanne, 1015 Lausanne, Switzerland, yves.pigneur@unil.ch

Abstract

Brand Identity is of paramount importance for organisations today. Due to the advancement of technology, faster innovation, growing competition and more demanding consumers, managing a brand is becoming more and more complex. Therefore, organisations need a consistent portrayal to create a single, compelling representation of themselves. Entrepreneurs in Startups and SMEs need to have a clear branding strategy: a narrative that defines the company's vision, inspires employees and others, and remains relevant through changes. This paper aims to present a systematic literature review that uncovers the key concepts of corporate brand identity, in order to lay the foundation for the development of a brand identity ontology. This ontology will be the first step towards the development of a strategic tool that helps entrepreneurs co-design their brand identity, in order to express and communicate a clear and consistent image to all their stakeholders. This paper also adds to the averment of emerging stream of research in Information Systems, that states that the Information Systems discipline, through its tradition in designing artefacts, has a role to play in the design of strategic management tools.

Keywords: Brand Identity, Ontology, Systematic Literature Review.

1 Introduction

Brand Identity is of paramount importance for organisations today. Due to the advancement of technology, faster innovation, growing competition and more demanding consumers, managing a brand is becoming more and more complex (Spence and Hamzaoui Essoussi, 2010; Balmer, 2008; Abratt and Kleyn, 2012; Klaus and Maklan, 2007). Brand Identity strategies guide brand decisions, guarantee the coherence of a marketing strategy over time and should be associated with specific and limited core values that are complementary to organisational value and culture (De Chernatony, 2001;Urde, 2003).

Airbnb's CMO notes with insight: « Purpose-driven companies create more value, a bigger impact in the world, and manage to attract and retain talent much, much more effectively than business-driven companies. » Organisations with a sense of purpose achieve greater levels of innovation and sustainability than those who do not. Brand identity is a key construct that helps companies define this sense of purpose. It helps companies differentiate themselves from competitors (Aaker 1996; Kapferer, 2004). The creation of a well-defined brand identity during a company's infancy helps it manage its strategic direction and the value it creates for stakeholders. Startups and SMEs need to attract attention from both internal and external stakeholders in order to be successful (Bresciani and Eppler, 2010). They need to communicate their purpose and identity in order to sell to their potential investors and customers, as well as to communicate consistently on social media. However, often SME owner-managers seem to think that branding is out of their reach (Merrilees, 2007).

Because brand identity concerns organization as wholes, its strategy usually involves different people. It is dynamic and evolves during an organisation's lifetime (Da Silveira et al., 2013). And because the brand identity concept might be hard to grasp for practitioners that do not have a marketing background, company founders might have different definitions and ways to look at it. Brand identity should nevertheless be seen as a part of the strategy of the startup or the SME and should be the result of discussions and reflexions between the founders and managers of Startups and SMEs. Visual inquiry tools typically support collaboration through structuring and visualizing a given problem, thus allowing for a better shared understanding of the problem. In particular, these tools support the process of ideation and exploration of a given problem in order to support teams in prototyping and exploring alternative potential solutions. These tools therefore suit the aforementioned situation where cross-disciplinary teams need to strategize on a given ill-structured problem. Nonetheless, according to a SME in the domain of energy in Switzerland and a Fintech Startup based in Switzerland and Mexico, who both tried to rethink the strategy of their brand identity, it is a real issue and to date, there are few tools available for this. The aim of this paper is thus to lay the foundations for the development of a visual tool that aims at helping teams of practitioners addressing their brand identity collaboratively.

This paper follows a Design Science Research Methodology for Information Systems (IS). We follow Osterwalder and Pigneur (2013), who consider IS researchers well-suited for designing strategic tools, given the IS tradition in designing artefacts. Adding to that, the idea of using visual tools to address ill-structured problems goes in line with Bork et al., (2017) who show that design approaches are well-suited for addressing such problems but lack some structure. In order to add structure, we follow the design principles proposed by Avdiji et al., (2018) for developing tools that support structuring and protoyping solutions of ill-structured management problems. The first principle aims at building an ontology of the given problem. We decided to develop a Unified Foundational Ontology (UFO) (Guizzardi, 2005) that captures the essence of brand identity. With this in mind, this paper presents the first steps towards that ontology, which is a systematic literature review that lays the foundation for an ontology of Startup and SME brand identity.

This paper's contributions are twofold: first we lay the foundation for the development of an ontology that will permit us to develop a visual tool for entrepreneurs to co-design their brand identity. And second, this ontology, implemented in a formal language could also be used by companies for supporting their Information Systems in order to manage their brand identity. The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: In Section 2, we describe the review process and the protocol underlining the systematic review. We present review results and findings in Section 3. In Section 4, we discuss these results and we conclude and discuss future work in Section 5.

2 Review Method

Following the review process (depicted in Figure 1) consists of four phases: 1. Extraction of the relevant literature, 2. Organisation preparation for Analysis, 3. Coding and Analysis, and 4. Reporting the results. But before extracting the relevant literature, one must define the research objectives of the review, and formulate research questions that the review aims to answer.
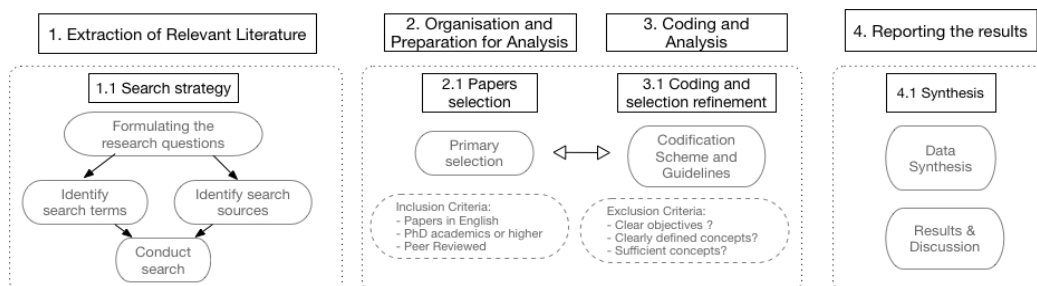

Figure 1.   Description of the review method

2.1 Conducting the review

According to Levy and Ellis (2006), formulating the review questions is a critical activity when conducting a systematic literature review, since these questions are used to derive the entire systematic review methodology (Okoli and Schabram, 2010). We formulate the following three research questions (RQ) to identify the primary (corporate) brand identity concepts from the literature:

- RQ1: What components are captured in *corporate brand identity*?
- RQ2: What components are necessary to build a Startup or SME brand identity?
- RQ3: Can these components be used for developing an ontology as a first step towards a visual co-design tool, to help Startups or SMEs co-design their brand identity strategy?

2.1.1 Search Strategy

The search terms are: *corporate* had to appear along with *brand* and *identity*. These terms could appear anywhere in the paper but had to be the exact expression: "corporate brand identity". For the search sources, we decided to gather multiple sources to ensure not missing any papers. The sources are different databases, and because corporate brand identity has been studied in different disciplines (from an organisational focus, a customer one, a marketing one and so on), we looked at it from a multisource perspective.

2.1.2 Organisation and preparation

The selection process (shown in Figure 2), has two iterative stages: the keyword search followed by backward and forward searches, as depicted by Levy and Ellis (2006) and Bandara et al., (2015). In the backward reference search, we added the references that did not appear in the keyword search but looked essential to the review and in the forward search we have added the appropriate papers that had cited the ones we found fundamental for explaining corporate brand identity. (vom Brocke et al., 2015).

2.1.3 Papers selection and coding and analysis

Searching Google Scholar, Emerald Fulltext, JSTOR, ISI Web of Knowledge and Springer Link, a total of **1,592** papers were found, using these specific search terms. The search period has not been defined, which means that these papers are all the papers referenced from 2017 and before, including duplicates. Once the duplicates were deleted, we had 1216 papers to look at. Then the following criteria were applied by first screening all the papers: **Inclusion criteria:** We included only papers in English that related to at least one of the research questions. To be included, the papers had to have been peer reviewed and written by graduate students or higher. **Exclusion criteria:** If a paper had several versions, we included only the most complete one. We evaluated the quality along three questions, eliminating any papers with less than two points. As explained by (Okoli and Schabram, 2010), one of the exclusion criteria was quality appraisal. To do so, we relied on the following questions: 1) Are the paper's objectives clearly justified and in line with our goal of explaining brand identity? 2) Are the proposed concepts clearly defined? 3) Does the paper propose sufficient concepts to explain corporate brand identity?
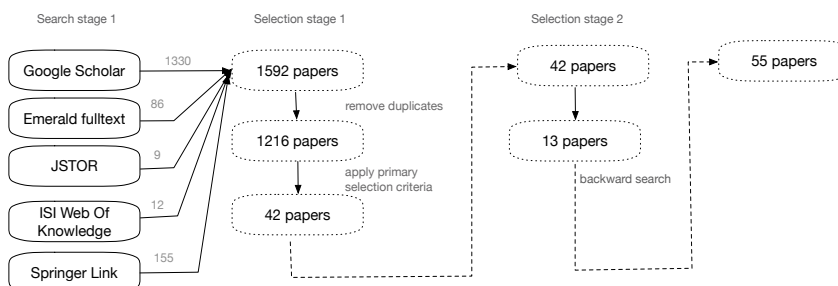

Figure 2.   *Description of the review method, in particular the paper selection process*

2.1.4   Reporting the results

The last stage of the literature review consists of summarizing the results, with two primary activities: 1) Data synthesis and 2) results and discussion. In the next section, we will show how data were synthesized to answer the research questions.

3   Review results

This section presents and discusses the review findings. To answer RQ1, we analysed the content of the 55 selected papers. By looking into these, we tried to map what concepts the authors were including in their definitions of *corporate brand identity,* and summarised the found concepts in Table 1. To answer RQ2 we looked at these concepts through the lens of the main differences between large corporations and smaller organisations (ie: Startups and SMEs) to see which of these concepts could be applied. And to answer RQ3, we looked at the 24 found elements through the lens of Hatch & Schultz's view on how to strategize about an organisation's brand identity, because they look at it from a dynamic and both internal/external perspective which makes sense when building a brand identity strategy.

RQ1. *What components are captured in corporate brand identity?* The review has identified 55 papers with different definitions of corporate brand identity. This concept has been looked at from a wide range of disciplines (marketing, organisational behaviour, strategy and communication), which explains the multiple definitions of this concept. This literature review shows that the corporate brand identity concept includes a set of components that determine a brand's way of being, thinking and behaving. It defines the purpose and meaning of a brand and the directions it should follow. For marketing scholars, one of the main concepts of corporate branding is identification. For instance, Aaker (2004) and Melewar et al., (2012) have defined corporate brand identity as the communication of the unique features of a product or service to customers, which in turn differentiates the brand from its competitors. From a strategic perspective, corporate branding is seen as a key activity that requires to be managed, which is constructed by different activities. In organisational behaviour, scholars tend to look at corporate brand identity to understand the relations between the internal and external stakeholders with the organisation.

RQ2. *What elements are necessary to build a Startup or SME brand identity?* We identified 24 concepts that can be used for constructing corporate brand identity (see table 1), derived from the existing literature, which has a strong focus on looking at corporate brand identity from the perspective of a large organisation. According to Spence and Hamzaoui Essoussi (2010), the main differences between corporate brand identity for a large organisation and corporate brand identity for smaller organisations such as SMEs and Startups are the following: in large organisations there is a visionary management, whereas in smaller organisations it is usually an individual who has a vision (usually the entrepreneur); and in a large organisation the process is extensively systematic, based on widespread market research, whereas in smaller organisations, the process is more intuitive and based on the entrepreneur's values, personality and perceptions.

RQ3. *Can these components be used for developing an ontology as a first step towards a visual co-design tool to help Startup or SMEs co-design their brand identity strategy?* Not all the 24 identified concepts are needed for developing the ontology as a basis for the design of a strategic tool. Ontologies have purposes (Fernández-López et al., 1997), and because the purpose of this ontology is to give a foundation to a strategic tool, we need to look at the components that will support the goal of the tool. This is why we chose to look at the components that were in line with the model presented by Hatch and Schultz (2001, 2003) that looks at brand identity strategy through the alignment of vision, culture and image; these results are presented in section 4. We chose to rely on this alignment model, is because it looks at the interactions of both the internal and external identity of the organisation, which is indispensable for supporting entrepreneurs in building and managing their brand identity.

Components	Authors
Aim and goals	(Aaker 2004); (Anisimova, 2014); (Leitch and Richardson, 2003); (Balmer, 2001); (Minkiewicz et al., 2007)
Brand heritage	(Burmann and Zeplin, 2005)
Communication/ Expression	(Abratt and Kleyn, 2012); (Balmer and Gray, 2003); (Balmer, 2005); (Dowling, 1986); (Srivastava, 2011); (Stuart, 1999); (Witt and Rode, 2005); (Urde, 2013)
Corporate behaviours	(Melewar and Wooldridge, 2001); (Witt and Rode 2005)
Culture	(Aaker 2004); (Balmer 2003); (Balmer and Grey 2003); (Percy and Elliot, 2007); (De Chernatony, 1999); (Barros et al., 2015); (Dowling, 1986, 1993); (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001); (Hatch et al., 1997); (Kapferer, 1997, 2002); (Leitch and Richardson 2003); (Mottram et al., 1998); (Ruediger Kaufmann et al., 2012); (Schultz, 2015); (Stuart, 2012); (Urde, 2013) ; (Witt and Rode 2005)
Customer reflection	(Balmer and Grey 2003); (Harris and De Chernatony 2001); (Barros et al. 2015); (Elliot and Percy 2007) (Kapferer 2002); (Leitch and Richardson 2003)
Employees	(Bravo et al., 2017)
Environmental influences	(Balmer and Gray 2003); (Kennedy, 1977); (Markwick and Fill, 1997)
Essence	(Roll, 2006); (Harris and De Chernatony 2001)
Image	(Coleman, 2011); (Einwiller and Will, 2002); (Esch et al., 2006);(Ruediger et al. 2012); (Schultz, 2015);
Leadership	(Ruediger et al. 2012)
Mission	(Aaker 2004); (Balmer et al., Fill, 1997); (De Chernatony 1999); (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001); (Glanfield et al., 2017); (Minkiewicz, et al. 2007);
Personality	(Aaker, 1996); (Abratt and Kleyn 2012); (Balmer and Grey 2003); (Burmann and Zeplin 2005); (Blombäck and Ramírez-Pasillas, 2012); (Barros et al. 2014); (Elliot and Percy 2007); (Esche et al, 2006); (De Chernatony 1999); (Harris and De Chernatony 2001); ((Kapferer, 1997)2002); (Leitch and Richardson 2003); (Marwick and Fill 1997); (Mindrut et al., 2015); (Minkiewicz, et al, 2007); (Mottram 1998); (Roll 2006); (Razeghi et al., 2014); (Shee and Abratt, 1989);(Srivastava 2011); (Stuart 1999); (Urde 2013)
Positioning	(De Chernatony 1999); (Harris and De Chernatony 2001); (Kapferer, 1991); (Mindrut and Manolica 2015); (Minkiewicz, et al, 2007); (Roll 2006); (Urde, 2013)
Presentation	(Harris and De Chernatony 2001); (Kapferer 1991); (de Chernatony 1999); (Mindrut and Manolica 2015);
Reflection of consumer self-image	(Balmer and Grey 2003); (Barros et al. 2014); (Elliot and Percy 2007); (Harris and De Chernatony 2001); (Kapferer 1997, 2002); (Leitch and Richardson 2003);
Relationships	(Aaker 1996); (Abratt and Kleyn 2012); (Balmer and Grey 2003); (Barros et al. 2014); (De Chernatony 1999); (Elliot and Percy 2007); Dowling (1986); (Harris and De Chernatony 2001); (Iglesias et al. 2013); (Kapferer 1997); (Kapferer 2002); (Kennedy 1997); (Leitch and Richardson 2003);(Mäläskä et al., 2010); (Mindrut and Manolica 2015); (Muzellec and Lambkin 2009); (Stuart 1998); (Urde 2013);
Reputation	(Balmer and Gray 2000); (De Chernatony 1999); (Marwick and Fill 1997); (Stuart 1999)

Strategy	(Balmer 2001) ; (Vella and Melewar, 2008)
Structure	(Rashid, 2012)
Value proposition	(Melewar and Wooldridge 2001); (Urde 2013)
Values	(Aaker 2004); (Balmer 2001); (Burmann and Zeplin 2005); (Coleman 2011); (Dall'Olmo Riley and De Chernatony, 2000); (Mäläskä et al. 2010); (Minkiewicz, et al, 2007); (Muzellec and Lambkin 2009); (Stuart 2012); (Urde 2013)
Vision	(Burmann and Zeplin 2005); (Einwiller and Ingenhoff 2008); (Glanfield et al,. 2017); (Harris and De Chernatony 2001); (Mindrut and Manolica 2015); (Mottram et al., 1998); (Roll 2006); (Ruediger et al,. 2012); (Schultz 2005); (Urde, 2016)
Visual components / Design / Physical	(Abratt 1989); (Abratt and Kleyn 2012); (Balmer and Grey 2003); (Barros et al. 2014); (Glanfield et al,. 2017); (Harris and De Chernatony 2001); (Kapferer 2002); (Leitch and Richardson 2003); (Witt and Rode 2005)

Table 1.   Summary and Mapping of the components found in the review applicable to SMEs an Startups according to Spence and Hamzaoui Essoussi (2010)

In the next section, we analyse these components and see how they could be applied to build a brand identity ontology.

4   Discussion

Despite the authors' different views on the components and definitions of brand identity, most of them agree that there are two facets to this concept: internal and external. Hatch and Schultz (2001, 2003) have come up with an approach that permits simultaneous focus on both, by aligning the culture (internal facet) to the identity (link between internal and external) and image (external facet). They are the first authors to look at identity as a mirror of the internal and external facets, thus allowing the integration of both. They state that a company needs to align its vision, culture, and image in order to have a consistent brand identity. According to these authors, once these elements are aligned and only then, an organisation can tell the complete story of its brand identity and implement it in order to develop its image, especially online. To allow for a first analysis towards what could be in the brand identity ontology for developing a strategic visual tool that allows teams to co-design their brand identity, we analysed the different components through the three pillars proposed by Hatch and Schultz (2001, 2003). According to this hypothesis, we selected the components that would fit in this model. Table 2 contains the chosen components that can be seen as sub-constructs of Hatch and Schultz's alignment model. In the first column of table 2, there are the three elements drawn from Hatch and Schultz's theory on brand identity alignment strategy. In the second column, we have classified some of the constructs we found that complied with the elements of the first column. We have developed the definitions for each construct by relying on the literature cited in table 1. The second column presents the nine elements from our literature review that fitted with the assumption that "Vision, Image and Culture" are the main elements that need to be aligned for developing a coherent brand identity strategy and that can be further developed in sub-constructs. We chose to look at Hatch and Schultz (2001, 2003), because they are the only authors who look at this concept with a dynamic perspective, where the process of identity is looked at from both the internal (vision), the external (image) parts but also their interaction (culture), we plan on translating that dynamism in the ontology. We have tested the validity of the nine found components with a Fintech Startup based in Switzerland and Mexico and a SME in the domain of Energy, based in Switzerland and they both told us that these elements make sense according to what they have seen while strategizing with marketing consulting companies on their brand identity. The elements found seem to encapsulate the concept according to the existing literature. We believe that these elements could be further used to construct a *brand identity ontology*.

Hatch & Schultz's alignment	Sub-constructs	Definitions
Vision	Vision	Reason of existence, vision and philosophy of the organisation and its long-term purpose. It is the starting point of all the organisation's activities.
	Values	The values of an organisation are the moral beliefs and principles that will be integrated in its culture.
	Positioning	The brand positioning incorporates the values, culture, strength and future directions, as differentiators from competitors.
Culture	Culture	A collective way of thinking, a collective feeling among internal stakeholders. This feeling results from values, beliefs and stakeholders' perception of the organisation.
	Personality	Refers to the mix of ideologies present within the organisation, including organisational beliefs, ideas and values.
	Relationships	Employees play a conclusive role in the brand's relation with all the different stakeholders (i.e.: consumers, suppliers, partners...).
Image	Communication	Refers to the media used to communicate with the external stakeholders. Communication is important to have a clear digital or social media strategy.
	Image	A collection of the public perception of the brand, which can be used as a control mechanism to ensure that the ideal projected image complies with the real projected image.
	Visual elements	These include all visual elements, such as the name, symbol, design of the website and everything that can be seen.

Table 2.   Overview of a subset of components pre-classified through Hatch & Schultz (2001's view on brand identity strategy).

5   Future work

Having a strong brand identity is crucial for Startups and SMEs (Merrilees, 2007; Muhonen et al., 2017). With a good brand identity strategy, smaller organisations can improve their identity and value communication to their consumers and stakeholders (Gehani, 2016). It allows them to differentiate themselves from competitors (Aaker 1996; Kapferer, 2012). It can also help them increase employee motivation, apart from attracting qualified candidates and greater investments (Arendt and Brettel, 2010). These are crucial for Startups and SMEs that might not have the resources to attract adequate qualified human capital. Adding to that, having a consistent brand identity can support them in planning a coherent social media strategy as well as keeping a coherent online image.

However, the strategizing of a brand identity implies an in-depth knowledge of the topic and of the factors that may influence it. Da Silveira et al., (2013) suggest that brand identity management is a dynamic process and that managers should therefore reshape brand identity over time, according to contextual changes. This is typically feasible with the help of a visual tool that would allow teams to inquire about brand identity before implementing their strategy. As stated by Avdiji et al., (2018), for developing such a tool, there are three design principles: 1. Frame the ill-structured problem by developing an ontology in which the main components and their relationships are modelled, 2. Represent this ontology into a shared visualisation 3. Instantiate the visualisation into a shared support, in order to use it as a problem space on which solutions can be prototyped. The systematic literature review

presented in this paper is a starting point in the development of a *brand identity ontology* that will allow the development of a visual tool for Startups and SMEs to collaboratively inquire about their brand identity. As stated by (Osterwalder and Pigneur, 2013) , because of their tradition in design, IS scholars have a role in designing strategic tools.

Future work includes designing the formal ontology with the components described in this paper. In particular, as presented in Elikan and Pigneur (2018), we plan to use the unified foundation ontology developed by Guizzardi (2005). We plan to test this ontology and to validate it by proving its internal coherence. Then, to evaluate the ontology's usability and utility: we will test it on case studies with Startups and SMEs, this will further allow us to eliminate incoherencies and demonstrate utility. Adding to that, we will ask practitioners to judge the tool's usability and its ability to describe the phenomena they witness.

The contribution of the proposed ontology is twofold. First, it would be the basis of a visual tool for entrepreneurs to co-design their brand identity. The conceptual model will, as proposed by Avdiji et al., (2018), be instantiated into a visual tool using visualization principles. This tool would allow practitioners to have a shared visual and shared understanding of their brand identity strategy. It would support and guide them towards explorations and discussions about potential brand identity strategies. This visual instantiation would be a *Brand Identity Canvas* that would complement the Business Model Canvas (Osterwalder and Pigneur 2011) and the Value Proposition Canvas (Osterwalder et al. 2014). It would thus, contribute to the practical domain by giving practitioners a strategic tool that can be used to co-design the building and management of their brand identity. Adding to that, we could investigate how the tool could integrate the work of Bork et al., (2017). Second, if the ontology is well implemented in a formal language, it can serve as a basis for supporting small organizations in the development of a software to implement their brand identity strategy.

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