Strategic Identity Errors

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To detect these errors, first, we have to define strategic identity.

Many ideas that we know –like love, friendship, etc. - can only be defined in relation to other ideas. That is to say; the other is required for a meaning to be implied. The concept of identity, here we mean the identity of an organization, a company, or a brand is no exception. The others are the audience who would understand and perceive an organization or a brand through being exposed to the appearance of a brand identity such as its visual identity, behavioral identity, and verbal identity. This identity would create some associations in the audience's mind. We all might have heard such things several times that a brand is genuine, trustable, innovative, etc. But where are all these concepts stemmed from?

Generally speaking, a collection of behaviors, actions, and everything related to an organization or brand that would be seen, heard or perceived by the audience will create an image or mentality in their mind that will shape the brand identity. The more the final image shaped in the audience's mind is close to the reality of the organization and brand, the better the identity would be. On the contrary, if the image is far from reality, there might be a problem for both sides. Hence, a systemized plan is necessary to create a strategic identity. Actually, the right strategic identity is the one that is based upon the audience's perceptions, expectations, and insight, rather than the inner wills and goals of the organization and brand. Consider a brand and organization that claims to be highly smart and up to date, while what the audience perceives, in reality, negates this. Or consider a brand and organization that boasts that it is different from other brands and organizations while, in fact, in the audience's eyes, it is not. No matter what, if the audience cannot approve the brand's claims, an error has already happened. Two common strategic identity errors have been assessed in the following:

•Inconsistency error

For instance, everyone know that oily food is one of the major causes of heart disease. Now consider a frying oil production company that uses an ironic advertising slogan that highlights its very weak point: We love your heart.

 When the reality is different from the message received by the audience (inconsistency between presence and visibility)

In fact, one of the main objectives of shaping a brand identity is providing the audience with a unified identity in every single touchpoints where they are exposed to a consistent message. If a brand cannot deliver such messages to its audience, it will perplex them by offering a fragmented identity. It's enough to take a look at these touchpoints, from visual identity to different messages delivered through environmental advertisements in the urban space, TV commercials, Website ads, and social media to notice this divergence.No need to mention that nothing in this world can be economical and luxurious at the same time. Now consider a car producer company that tells people: Hurry up, it's luxury as well as economical.

Another example can be an organization that claims to offer up to dated services to its audience, while in fact, it hasn't updated its website for several months.

•Me Too Error

Visual identity is one of the main – or let's say the major- touchpoint of a brand or organization's identity. It includes logo, colors, and every small details like color functioning and the interior architecture elements that are concentrated in a harmony whole in order to give the right message that would impress the audience. One of the major functions of visual identity is giving distinction to a company/ organization/ brand compared with other colleagues and competitors in the same industry. That is to say; the audience will use a brand's visual identity to be able to distinguish between that brand and its rivals. However, when this doesn't happen, and all organizations follow some similar ideas, their visual identity would be similar too. Therefore, not only the audience cannot distinguish a brand's identity in the first step but also they can't even recall it later.

For example, the logos of almost all of the airlines in Middle East are taken from a single idea: Birds!

In banking industry, the idea of creating a visual identity for about %70 of the banks is keeping and protecting money.

Almost all the insurance companies' advertising slogans focus on providing their audience

with peace.

Also, most startups do their best to compete with each other through creating interesting identities in order to be regarded as a real startup.

The aim of branding and creating a strategic identity is to have a unified identity; an identity created based on some strategies that are designed according to the audience and their expectations and insights rather than the subjective tastes and interests of the business holders. When this path is over, the audience would be faced with a special identity for each brand or organization. So there would be no problem in working with those brands and organizations. Anyway, such errors mostly result from a lack of straightforward strategies as well as ignoring the audience and their expectations in branding and identity formation equations. To get rid of such errors, organizations must change their approach in development of strategies. An audience-oriented approach would rescue organizations and brands from personal interests so that they would walk into a clear path where they can assess the situation and make decisions. It can also play the role of a road map that prevents fragmentation and divergence and creates unity and consistency. As a result, a single message would be delivered to the audience: The Strategic Message.

One of the most successful examples that takes benefit from this approach in giving its strategic message to the audience is Apple. This strategic message that is crystal clear in the visibility of every single product of this brand is: Think different! This difference is distinguishable in Apple's every touchpoint with the audience, including distinguished design of the products, operation systems, advertisement, and even the material used in producing its products. In fact, it's not the nature of the Apple products that attract audiences, but it is the audience's belief in themselves as well as this different thinking that makes this brand appealing.

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