

Student Name: Laura Mary Wade.

P Number: 2104041.

University: Swansea College of Art, UWTSD.

Programme of Study: BA (Hons) Graphic Design.

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Tutor's Name: Donna Williams.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Chapter 1 – Branding	2
Figure.1	2
Figure.2	2
Figure.3	3
Figure.4	4
Chapter 2 – Hierarchy	5
Figure.5	5
Figure.6	6
Figure.7	7
Figure.8	7
Chapter 3 – Sport	7
Figure.9	8
Figure.10	8
Figure.11	8
Figure.12	8
Figure.13	9
Figure.14	10
Figure.15	10
Conclusion	10
Independent Inquiry Proposed Question	11
Bibliography	12

Independent Inquiry Proposal: Branding, Hierarchy and Sport.

Introduction

Throughout this proposal I will critically analyse and consider the topic of three words: branding, hierarchy and sport and their association with graphic design. These are words that I consider in my practise as a designer and subjects I have an interest in, I have researched and considered each word in detail with my findings documented throughout. I will conclude this essay with a relevant question that I propose to research further to provide a starting point for my Independent Inquiry during my final year of study.

Chapter 1 – Branding

In today's world we as human beings are frequently exposed to different forms of branding, often without even noticing. The wide-open terminology of 'branding' has been ingrained into our society for thousands of years to create a specific identity to signify ownership. It can be defined as "Branding is endowing products and services with the power of a brand" (Kotler & Keller, 2015, p.323).

Throughout history the methodology of applying a mark has been seen in one of the earliest forms of cattle branding. Farmed livestock were branded using a red-hot iron which contained a ranch/farm specific symbol or mark and this allowed differentiation between herds of livestock, originally dating back to the Egyptians. Brand recognition allows farmers to easily distinguish their herd from others, this is a fundamental to a successful brand in the modern world as well.

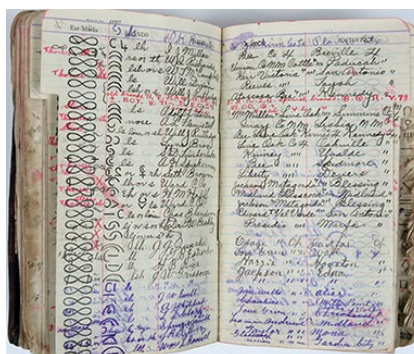


Figure.1 Open Range
(Photo: Kansas State
Historical Society)

Figure.2 Texas Cattle
Raisers' Association Brand
Inspection Book, (1910).

Visual identity acts as a voice for a brand to speak to its consumers, allowing instant recognition through logo, colour, taglines etc to be memorable and easily recallable. Often this emulates the brand's values and story, which gives consumers the feeling of being valued and feeling part of the brand and acts as a returnable selling point. "A brand vision should attempt to go beyond functional benefits to consider organizational values; a higher purpose; brand personality; and emotional, social, and self-expressive benefits." (D.Aaker, 2014) The Aaker Brand Equity Model suggests that creating a strategy can lead to a larger customer base with a higher percentage of brand loyalty. The model includes five key areas: Brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand associations, proprietary assets and brand awareness. Furthermore, brands that are seen to be driving recognition are often the most successful due to the emotional connection, this guides consumer purchasing habits on a specific brand. Closely linked to the brand association section, due to our humanly instinct if a brand is more widely recognised, we often naturally associate the quality of a product or service to be higher – but this could be an incorrect assumption.

An example of this theory can be seen today in the world of technology, Apple Inc. which was founded by Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak in the year of 1976, the company has grown to become the most valuable brand worldwide in the year 2022. But how? Brand power has meant that the Apple trademark has become globally known and recognised, so much so that consumers are willing to spend on all the products. The Apple Inc logo is widely recognised by the general public so therefore can remain simple and effective. The trust built between the company and its consumers has developed over time, they believe in the brand, they believe in the products.

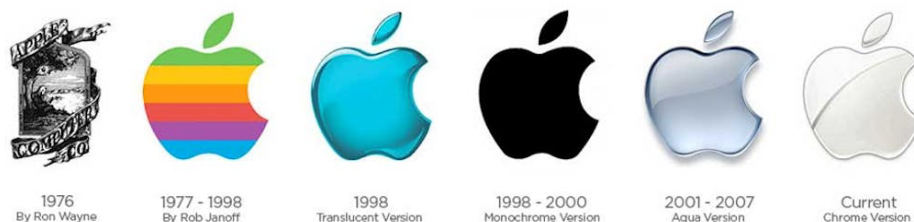
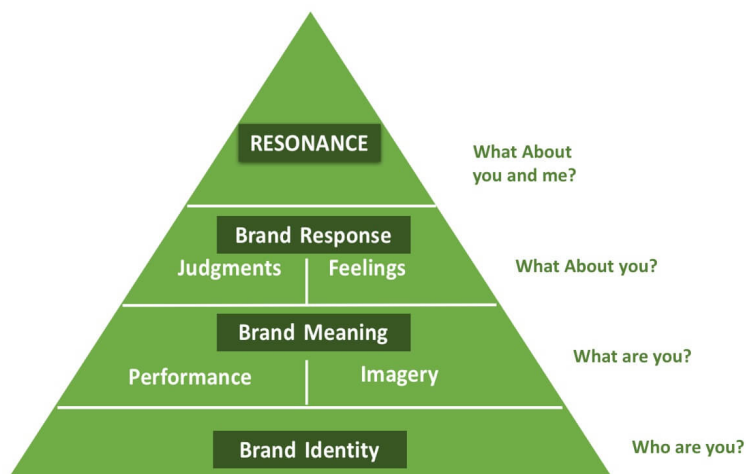


*Figure.3 Apple Inc
Branding from 1976 to
2022 (current).*

In contrast to the previous model, Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model provides a marketing perspective, with the theory being solely based on customers providing companies' profit.

You don't spend ten years appealing to middle-aged women and then suddenly turn around and start trying to connect with 25-year-old women. You're almost certainly going to alienate the people who have an investment in your brand, and there's no guarantee you're going to be successful with the new group. (K.Keller, 2007).

The brand model shows that if customers are happy then the brand can thrive and become a more profitable business.



Keller's Brand Equity Model – CBBE Model

Figure.4 Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model, (1993).

The brand model shows a pyramid, the sections lead to the top of the pyramid where brands become successful, this technique allows brands to visualise where they are and what is required next. At the base customers need to be able to recognise your brand from competitors in the same sector, this can be achieved through advertising campaigns. Working up through the diagram, brand response is the initial feelings for a product once purchased, Keller works on the opinion that word of mouth and the power of social media means more products will be purchased due to customer satisfaction. On the other hand, this can lead to a bad brand image where unsatisfactory feedback may become a detractor for the company. Branding can make or break a business, but with outstanding design and theory, a business can become a powerhouse through the power of branding.

Chapter 2 – Hierarchy

Visual hierarchy can be defined as “refers to the organization of the design elements on the page so that the eye is guided to consume each design element in the order of intended importance. Visual hierarchy can be created using: Color and contrast.” (Nielsen Norman Group, 2021). A fundamental element to successful graphic design is to show the level of importance of content by manipulating many different hierarchy characteristics. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory clearly shows a pyramid, encompassing human needs, developed in 1943, it has been a standout concept in psychology and later human motivation.



Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Figure.5 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory Model, (1943).

“I suppose it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail.” (A.Maslow, 1961). The pyramid visually shows that human needs are arranged in the level of importance, with the base providing physiological needs (e.g. food and shelter) and working up to the apex showing self-actualisation (e.g. realising your dreams). Maslow’s theory can be linked to the fundamentals of graphic design; the base expressing the functionality of the information required leading up to the creativity of the design.

In addition, Gestalt principles are key pillars in human perception when visually looking at design, it describes how we as human beings group and perceive objects. As designers we can use these principles to develop hierarchy of information across all medias of graphic design.

The basic thesis of Gestalt's theory might be formulated thus: there are contexts in which what is happening in the whole cannot be deduced from the characteristics of the separate pieces, but conversely; what happens to a part of the whole is, in clearcut cases, determined by the laws of the inner structure of its whole. (M.Wertheimer, 1959, p.84).

The theory contain six principles these are seen as the laws: closure, common fate, continuation, similarity, figure ground and proximity (the terminology used often differs).

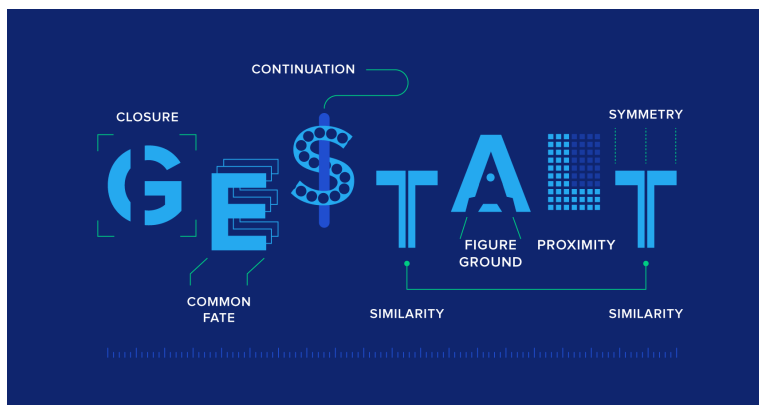


Figure.6 Exploring the Gestalt Principles of Design, (2018).

I am going to further discuss and analyse two specific pillars, closure and proximity. The principle of closure is one that is often seen in logo design, and uses the brain function to combat design which allows large chunks of an image/design to be missing as the brain's ability allows these missing parts to be filled in. In simpler form, of this can be described as the eye following a dotted line until it reaches the finish. Proximity is the pillar of design that refers to the distance between elements, this is closely linked to negative space. With reference to graphic design the more surround space given to a group of elements/text the more recognisable and further up the level of hierarchy it becomes. There are many examples of these principles in practice, but I am specifically going to link these to the Swiss Style master, Armin Hofmann.



Figure.7 *Giselle*, (1959).



Figure.8 *Junge Hollandische Bildhauer*, (1960).

"For after all, a poster does more than simply supply information on the goods it advertises; it also reveals a society's state of mind" (A.Hofmann, 2018). Figure.7 is one of Hofmann's best-known designs showcasing an outdoor production of *Giselle*, this replicates the pillar of proximity by the letter "i" breaking away from the normal strict grid layout, with much more negative space surrounding which juxtaposes the little kerning given in the rest of the typography. In this era of type, most sans-serif typefaces would contain a square tittle (dot on the i) but the designer breaks this and subtly nods to where to knee of the dancer would be with a circular tittle. The smaller typographic section is given larger proximity space due to it containing important dates and other information. Figure.8 is a prime example of the pillar of closure, the letterpress negative space 'H' is seen to be cut out of the black space, due to the brain's function we can fill the space and recognise it as the letter H. This allows it to have a level of hierarchy, and stand out from the poster design, with the 'Junge holländische Bildhauer Kunsthalle Basel' typography being next in the level of hierarchy.

Chapter 3 – Sport

In this chapter I am going to discuss and analyse the development of the sporting world and how graphic design and branding has had an impact on its development over the years. The Oxford Languages Dictionary describes the word sport as "an activity involving physical exertion and skill in which an individual or team competes against another or others for entertainment." (Oxford Dictionary

of English, 2015). The sporting world can play a massive part of people's lives, from spectating to being an athlete but without graphic design the publicity, awareness and identities of sport wouldn't exist in today's world.

Nike is the leading sports brand; including athletic apparel, accessories and footwear companies in the world. (Statista, 2022). The development of this sporting brand began in 1971 when designer Carolyn Davidson was tasked at designing its identity, little did she know how successful it would become.



Figure.9, Figure.10,
Figure.11, Figure.12
Carolyn Davidson
sketches and
development of Nike
logo. (1971).

The brand meaning behind the development of the Nike logo was inspired by the Greek Goddess of 'Victory' which emulates the messaging of the brand, unsurprisingly now linking to the current success. The "swoosh" depicts a form of motion through the arc and shape, closely linking to the movement that one completes when taking part in sport. Furthermore, the onomatopoeia of the sound of an athlete speeding past you is an outstanding design connection. That said the well-known "swoosh" Davidson designed still stands today, over fifty years later which shows the versatility and timeless nature of the design. "Reading words puts them in your mind. You never forget. Even when you don't get chance to dwell on the music, you can hear it in your head." (C.Davidson, 2014). True to her words, Davidson was able to design a brand identity that the sporting industry is unable to forget.

Brand recognition through athlete endorsements and sponsorships makes the sporting industry become immensely competitive, brands want the top athletes to drive their profit up and ultimately become the powerhouse in the industry. An example of this involving Nike is with top basketball player, Michael Jordan. In 1984, rookie Jordan was beginning his career in the NBA looking for a sponsorship, mainly with Adidas (Nike's main competitor in the industry). However, Nike offered the athlete an unmissable opportunity with the chance to create a court specific shoe. The Nike Air Jordans were born, and the rest is history, with \$126 million sold in the first year alone. (Statista, 1985). Due to the reputation of the athlete that Nike was associated with the brand became more widely recognisable, and in turn increased sales.



*Figure.13, Welcome to Sunny Portland
Advertisement with Michael Jordan
(1991).*

Similarly, the association of athletes and brands is an excellent example of how the Olympic Games achieves this for nations and countries around the globe, improving engagement and reputation due to publicity. "The modern Olympic Games are the world's foremost multi-sports event." (International Olympic Committee, 2021). This prestigious event which is held every four years across the world, has had a positive impact on multiple nations, graphic design assists in this because of the brand reputation of the games along with the advertising surrounding each event.

World-class sporting events such as the Olympic Games attract great media attention and coverage, leading to increased global awareness of the host country. Host countries actively take advantage of such great opportunities to enhance their CIs and competitive positions. (Black and Westhuizen, 2004, p.74).

This approach can be seen visually depicted in the Seoul Olympic Games, 1988 graphic design.

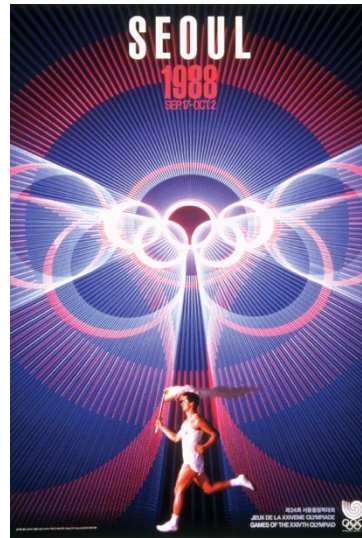


Figure.14, Seoul Olympic Games Emblem (1988).

Figure.15, Seoul Olympic Games Poster (1988).

The designs uses 'Samtaeguk pattern' which is a traditional pattern representing the nation of Korea. The centripetal motion represented the people of the world coming together in Korea, thus symbolising worldwide harmony, while the centrifugal motion represented a march onward in search of man's lasting happiness and prosperity. (International Olympic Committee, 2021).

The Olympic Park became a hub for sport and culture along with a boost in the tourism sector. The number of international visitors to Korea grew by 16.4 per cent in 1986, 12.9 per cent in 1987, 24.9 per cent in 1988 and 16.6 per cent in 1989. (International Olympic Committee, 2020). Statistics show that the nation was put on the map because of the sporting event. The brand identity supported Korea's image to change with a boost to a rising economy which allowed greater international cooperation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, these three words I have critically analysed throughout this research document show the impact that graphic design can have on many different subjects. As Jeff Bezos states "Your brand is what other people say about you when you're not in the room" (J.Bezos, 2016). This presents its

core message of personal and human emotions regarding branding and the impact it has on us as human beings. This has leads me on to consider the role that we as graphic designers play...through our use of hierarchy we are able to manipulate consumers purchasing habits through our consideration of the Gestalt principles. But do consumers really know this is happening? Successful branding can not only provide profit for a business but more importantly awareness and recognition on a larger scale, thus being shown through the poignant Olympic Games. This event is often only considered in a sporting context, but would the Olympics be as well-recognised without the power of a brand identity? To conclude, graphic design has a positive impact on all three areas.

Independent Inquiry Proposed Question

This research has led me to develop the question; **Can graphic design be the driving force behind the success of large sporting events?** I will start my research for my independent project on this question, however it will be a working title and may be subject to change.

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