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The Importance of Design Management to Brand Strategy

Jia Wang^{1,*}, Min Li¹, Tingyu Wan¹

¹ Art College, Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics, Nanchang City, Jiangxi Province, 330013, China

*Corresponding author e-mail: 784362505@qq.com

Abstract. With the rapid development of economic globalization, more and more enterprises focus their development planning on the brand strategy. An excellent brand strategy should be supported by good design management, and a successful brand strategy comes from high-level design management. In this paper, the status quo of design management and the role of brand strategy are introduced. “MUJI” is taken as an example to illustrate that design management runs through the brand strategy and the importance of design management to brand strategy.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of economic globalization, brand strategy has become an important parameter indicator for the sustainable development of enterprises. More and more companies are focusing their development plan on the layout of brand strategy. Brand is the vitality of sustainable development of enterprise innovation. Good brand strategy should be supported by good design management. Successful brand strategy comes from high-level design management. Design is not only to establish concepts, provide technologies, and create good service qualities for corporate brands, but also to design the perfect touch of the brand to capture, reflecting its unique character. Therefore, good design ideas are gradually seen as a competitive advantage that can sustain the sustainable development of corporate brand strategy for a long time. With the rising status of design in the corporate brand strategy, design management is increasingly valued as a key point in the connection between business and design.

2. The concept, importance and status of design management

2.1. The concept and importance of design management

The concept of “design management” was first proposed by British designer Michael Farry in 1966, “Design management is to define design issues, to find the right designer, and to make the designer solve the budget problem in a timely manner within the established budget [1]”. Nowadays, with the development of society, people are increasingly pursuing the value of the brand due to the excellent creative design is emerging one after another and good design brands are dazzling. Establishing a good brand image has become the consensus of many companies, and the establishment of a good brand image requires excellent design. Design is a process of integration of designer thinking innovation and behavior creation. Designers will collide with many links in the design process. One link is that the designers communicate effectively with various departments e.g., mass market, brand marketing and management. The division of labor and cooperation with each other can effectively accomplish the design goals and reflect their value.

Design management is a systematic process. It is not just about “design plus management”. It is



about how to integrate and coordinate a series of design activities and strategies that manage them, though communicate effectively to achieve goal consensus in final. If there is design, there will be management. In the work, designers and managers sometimes have differences, which are attributed to the great differences in the way they think about problems and the scope of their work. In general, the designer is the creative creator, and his work focus is sometimes biased towards emotional design creativity. He is the executor of research and decision making in creative performance and construction solutions. However, managers usually have a strong analytical ability. He is a project organization, deployment, and coordinator. Their rational analytical skills make them pay more attention to work steps, efficiency, comprehensive system planning, and so on. Therefore, design management plays a decisive role in the design project.

2.2. The status quo of design management in China

In the context of the digital creative industry and the creative economy's continuous upgrading and cross-border integration, the competition of enterprises has become increasingly fierce. The requirements for design have become higher and higher and for designers and managers have been further improved, therefore, design management has received extensive attention.

Design management is an emerging field in the discipline of management. Its production and development time is relatively short, and research progress at home and abroad is uneven. The research on design management is largely based on theoretical research in China. However, in South Korea, Japan, and the West, its design management has occupied an important position in enterprise development management, which requires Chinese scholars to learn from the rapid development of other countries and make up for their own shortcomings in the development of this field. The current shortcomings of design management in China are as follows: (1) the development of China's design management has not been highly valued in the status of corporate brand strategic activities and the importance of its functions. (2) design management theory rarely plays its role in the enterprise as much as possible.

In the face of these problems, we should focus on how to use the relevant theoretical knowledge of design management to make the design work play the biggest role in the corporate brand strategy and create more social benefits.

3. The role of corporate brand strategy core value

3.1. The connotation of brand strategy

The brand strategy is the enterprise's overall action plan based on the analysis and study of its own conditions and external environment with the core of brand creation, use and maintenance [2].

3.2. The role of brand core value

A brand is an intangible asset that can bring a premium to the owner and increase its value. Its carrier is a name, term, symbol, sign or design and its combination that is distinguished from other competitors' products or services. The source comes from the impression of its carrier formed in the minds of consumers [3-4]. The important role of exploring the core value of a brand can be summarized as:

(1) Enhance the cohesiveness of the enterprise. A successful brand strategy can enhance the cohesiveness of the enterprise from the inside to double the sense of identity, belonging of the employees within the company, and make them feel happy and start their own work, and willing to work together with the company to develop and progress together.

(2) Improve the influence of enterprises. Excellent brands are easy to reach people's consensus. On the one hand, they can increase their investment value. On the other hand, they can attract more talents.

(3) Improve the visibility of enterprises and strengthen the competitiveness of enterprises. Because of the intangible influence of brands, enterprises can effectively improve their manpower, material

resources and financial resources.

4. Design management runs through the brand strategy - taking Japan's "MUJI" as an example

A corporate brand is an important indicator that distinguishes its products from other products or enterprises. It is a necessary choice for an enterprise to reflect its core competitiveness [5]. For the public, it is a guarantee of reputation and quality. In today's dazzling array of products, companies create their own influence by creating brands, and the public chooses what they want through different brands and different content. Brands have a win-win situation between the sales influence of the company and the satisfaction of the public shopping. The benefits created by the brand for the company are inherent and lasting.

A successful brand can demonstrate its own brand value, it can be able to spread positive and upward core values, and have the responsibility and obligation to guide consumers to rational consumption. In this work, we are taking the Japanese "MUJI" brand as an example. It was born in a grandiose and secular society, but it adheres to its unique brand standard: "low-key, natural, environmentally friendly, and healthy". The society spreads new consumption views and values, namely: anti-fashion and anti-show concept of civilian consumption. The brand standard of MUJI is a soft standard for creating new consumption, its brand image communication influences people's consumption concept in a certain sense [6].

4.1. MUJI's era background

For the well-known brand of MUJI, it was founded in 1980 by the *Seiyō Ryōhin Keikaku Co., Ltd.* of Japan. The meaning of "unprinted" in Japanese national language is "no pattern", which can be extended to no brand. In general, "good" refers to high quality and low quality products. "MUJI" is "a good product without brand". The innovative consumption concept of MUJI brand strategy finally formed a unique brand of "low-key, natural, environmentally friendly and healthy" [7].

After the Second World War, with the Japanese economy developed rapidly and luxury brands were dazzling, it was setting off a fanatical brand of hot air. In the mid-to-late 1970s, the world economy was declining and the public consumption power was low. With the development of industrial design at the time, the lack of resources and other issues, Japan has switched the views from pursuing luxury goods to the era of rational consumption. As a result, MUJI, which is cost-effective and returns to the essence of the product, officially entered the commercial stage under the establishment of *Xeiyou Co., Ltd.*, the president of *Seiji Tsusumi*.

4.2. The consumption values of MUJI brand strategy communication

The creator of MUJI has been very accurate in positioning the brand from the very beginning, and its brand strategy standards reflect its unique brand values. MUJI has emerged in the public view with its unbranded brand strategy, leading the "anti-fashion" and "anti-show" civilian consumption concept. Its products pursue minimalist design concepts from design to production, and over-packaging on packaging, remove glitz, delete complex and simple, pay attention to functional expression, which guarantees quality and advocates rational consumption. In the promotion, there is no flood of advertising for its promotion, thus, saving publicity expenses to make it simple, only the function itself and the form material are used. At the same time, MUJI advocates the concept of natural ecology, advocates green design, and recognizes nature is also the best, and conveys the sustainable development of ecological consumption concept to consumers.

4.3. Design management runs through MUJI

With a highly sensitive design management team and design management talents who are good at integrating planning, they combine with the brainy designers to create a brand with enormous influence. Design management throughout MUJI can always be reflected in the following aspects:

First of all, it has a strong team. At the beginning of the founding of MUJI, the founder of *Seiji Tsusumi* invited the artistic director Mr. *Ikko Tanaka*. The team of its powerful elite began to develop

and plan and promote deep collaboration with various departments. In this regard, the brand strategic image of MUJI was initially established. During its growth and development, it also introduced industry celebrities such as product designer *Naoto Fukasawa* and art director *Kenya Hara*, and these qualified designers communicated with the senior management of MUJI to review the overall brand strategy and strictly grasp the trend of product innovation and development of MUJI. In this way, high-level personnel gathered in diverse wisdom can gather in the brand strategy of MUJI design and development companies to effectively maintain the concept that the brand wants to create and efficiently carry out management to fully shape the brand image of MUJI.

Second, MUJI has a rigorous brand and design management system. A successful brand growth and expansion will inevitably encounter ups and downs. At the beginning, MUJI, which had been in business for more than a decade, was not doing effective and comprehensive communication between the management team because of the variety of stores and products and the complacency of employees and peer competition. It has led to a decline in performance. Based on this, president *Tadamitsu Matsui* paid attention to the efficient management and maintenance of the brand image. Under his auspices, MUJI produced two books, “*MUJI GRAM*” and “*Business Standard Book*” to guide the operation of the company. Once again, it embodies the importance of design management for corporate brand strategy, clarifies the core concept, enhances team execution, and regulates a series of problems such as store operation system product collocation through design management manual. The MUJI shops can accurately convey the brand’s strategic goals and attributes of MUJI to consumers.

It can be seen that in the planning and establishment of corporate brand strategy, design managers and designers should pay close attention to the forward-looking nature of service and customers and the whole brand strategy, and pay attention to the overall process of building brand strategy so that design management runs through the brand strategy.

5. Introduce and strengthen design management to build brand core values

Taking the above-mentioned MUJI in Japan as an example, it shows that design management runs through the brand strategy, and strengthening design management is very important for establishing the core value of the brand. Because the brand strategy will indirectly affect the popularity, it is a quiet thing for the growth of a company. Through design management, the company’s staff recognizes the corporate brand strategy and twists into a rope for enterprise development and self-development. Over time, the launch of the corporate brand strategy creates a sense of identity and belonging through employee effort and consumer experience. In the meantime, it has become more important to establish a relatively complete design management concept system, because design management plays a coordinating and macro-control role in the whole design-related activities and project processes. In the process of brand building, design managers need to have a forward-looking vision to gain insight into the changes in the market’s international market and the changes in the environment, to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of competitors, the cognitive behavior of consumers, etc. The investigation situation adjusts its own brand strategy, knows itself and responds to new situations and changes, appropriately adjusts product design and management, thus truly establishing and maintaining the core of brand value and promoting the development of the company.

6. Conclusion

In the current society, various kinds of life information appear explosively, real-time dynamic development, and diversified product models, which requires enterprises to rationally integrate and organize the use of resources. A flexible design management system is the most important strategic resource of an enterprise. The vitality of brand strategy comes from the core value connotation of the brand, which can be created and achieved through effective design managements. Design management can create brand culture to lead social life. The creation of a successful enterprise brand strategy is the inevitable path for the sustainable development of enterprises. Enterprises should grasp the relationship with design management from the perspective of brand strategy and implement effective design managements. In order to enhance the visibility of a company, strengthen brand influence and

competitiveness, it is necessary to correctly understand the important role of design management in corporate brand strategy. Thereby, we can create the brand advantage of Chinese enterprises, face the challenges of social development and internationalization, and strive to accelerate from China's manufacturing to China's creation.

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