



Marketing function and form: How functionalist and experiential architectures affect corporate brand personality

Ursula Raffelt^a, Bernd Schmitt^{b,c,*}, Anton Meyer^a

^a Munich School of Management, Ludwigstr. 28 RG III, 80539 Munich, Germany

^b Columbia Business School, 3022 Broadway, New York, NY 10027, United States

^c Institute on Asian Consumer Insight (ACI) at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

First received in 8, March 2012 and was under review for 5 months

Available online 16 May 2013

Area Editor: Amitava Chattopadhyay

Keywords:

Corporate architecture

Design

Corporate image

Brand personality

Experience

ABSTRACT

How are the designs of corporate buildings used to create meaning and project a corporate image and personality? We distinguish functionalist architecture (“form follows function”), which focuses on the primary, utilitarian function of a building, from experiential architecture (“from function to form”), which uses the form of a building to communicate symbolically about the organization. A large-scale quantitative study including 150 buildings shows that four architectural design types (“solid,” “balanced,” “expressive,” and “disruptive” designs, emerging from a mix of functionalist and experiential architectures, lead to distinct corporate brand personalities (e.g., competence for functionalist architecture and excitement for experiential architecture). We validate these findings in a qualitative study and discuss how this research contributes toward the development of a consumer-oriented design theory.

© 2013 Published by Elsevier B.V.

1. Introduction

Corporate buildings are omnipresent in our daily lives. We encounter these buildings by sight, by visiting them, and through the media. Corporate buildings are the physical manifestations of the organizations within them and shape and define our landscapes and the skylines of our cities. Most importantly, in today's consumer society, many organizations use corporate buildings to project a corporate image and personality to their current and potential customers.

Prior research has largely neglected the issue of the relation between corporate architecture and brand personality. Marketing scholars have established that visual expression is a form of communication and have shown that design elements contribute to the formation of brand beliefs and influence brand strength. This research focused largely on micro-level issues of design and meaning, examining logos (Henderson & Cote, 1998, p. 23), typefaces (Henderson, Giese, & Cote, 2004, p. 64), packaging (DeBono, Leavitt, & Backus, 2003; Leder, Carbon, & Kreuzbauer, 2007; Orth & Malkewitz, 2008; Underwood, 2003; Underwood & Klein, 2002) and product design (Brunel, 2006).

Architectural design, however, is far more complex than any of the prior design stimuli investigated. Architectural language comprises a

continuum, ranging from very concrete, construction-related, technical terms to abstract, impression-related, stylistic terms. It is therefore important to examine how consumers view architectural stimuli, such as corporate buildings and company headquarters, and how companies may use their buildings to create meaning and project a corporate image and personality. Moreover, insight into the complex designs in architecture may add to the research findings emerging from simpler designs found in logos, typefaces and products.

In this article, we distinguish two general design types of corporate architecture that we expect to create corporate brand impressions and personalities. We present a large-scale quantitative study that relates architectural design dimensions (e.g., degree of elaborateness or harmony) and design types (e.g., functionalist and experiential) to corporate brand personality. We subsequently validate and extend our findings through a qualitative study. In both studies, we focus on the external shape rather than the interiors of corporate buildings because consumers define an image of a company based on the exterior appearance.

2. Two key architectural design types and their variations

The rise of the modern organization following the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century was accompanied by architectural styles that reflected the spirit of the times. Originally, corporate architecture followed the principle “form follows function” that was first formulated by American architect Louis Sullivan in 1896. Sullivan's principle, which became closely associated with the functionalist

* Corresponding author at: Columbia Business School, 3022 Broadway, New York, NY 10027, United States. Tel.: +1 212 854 3468; fax: +1 212 854 3762.

E-mail addresses: raffelt@bwl.lmu.de (U. Raffelt), bhs1@columbia.edu (B. Schmitt), marketing@bwl.lmu.de (A. Meyer).

movement in architecture, states that the shape—or “form”—of a building should be based solely on its intended function or purpose. The architects of the influential Bauhaus school, such as Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, popularized the functionalist view of architecture, which influenced architectural design throughout most of the 20th century, and into the 21st century, through the International Style (Le Corbusier and, later, Philip Johnson) and the works of I.M. Pei and Richard Meier.

As the economy shifted from production to consumption and toward an “experience economy” (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) and as marketing shifted from a focus on features and benefits toward “experiential marketing” (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Schmitt, 1999), the established functionalist language of corporate architecture gave way to a new aesthetic, emphasizing expression, symbolism, the plurality of form, and experience (Venturi, Brown, & Izenour, 1977), which we will henceforth call “experiential architecture.” Experiential architecture constitutes a shift “from function to form” (Klingmann, 2007), with corporate architecture now emphasizing the brand instead of the functionality of the building (Bahamón, Cañizares, & Corcuera, 2009). Corporate buildings are viewed explicitly as a form of communication (Hattenhauer, 1984). While the functionalist style of architecture is still widespread, experiential architecture is increasingly being used in the design of new corporate buildings today. Experiential architecture is associated with the postmodern and deconstructivist movements and with architects such as Frank Gehry, Rem Koolhaas, Daniel Libeskind, and Zaha Hadid.

Well-known functionalist and experiential buildings are shown in Fig. 1a. Some of these buildings are considered classics; others are fairly recent buildings. Examples also refer to different movements, e.g., the early industrial orthogonal look of the Bauhaus; the rounder, more natural looking buildings of the later phases of functionalist architecture; and the experiential architectures of the so-called “blobitecture” and deconstructivist movements. Fig. 1b contrasts functionalist and experiential buildings of three organizations—BMW, a German car manufacturer; CCTV, mainland China's television broadcaster; and Columbia Business School, a business school in New York. BMW Welt, a multi-purpose facility built in Munich by the renowned architectural firm CoopHimmet(1)au in 2007, uses visual analogies of a tornado followed by a cover of clouds to elicit consumer perceptions of dynamism and challenge—the core brand values of BMW (Feireiss & Wintner, 2007). In comparison, the BMW headquarters, completed in 1972 in the midst of the modernist movement, is a functionalist office building, visually representing components of automotive engines. Similarly, star architect Rem Koolhaas' new building for CCTV, completed in Beijing in 2008, is supposed to express the value of “collective inhabitation” (Zalewski, 2005), and the newly planned building of Columbia Business School in New York City is described by the architects as “an open and inter-disciplinary model [that] replaces the top-down logic of industrial-age knowledge transfer” (<http://www.unstudio.com/research/iop/beyond-the-classroom-research-on-knowledge-spaces>). In contrast, CCTV's earlier headquarters and Columbia Business School's 1961 building are purely functionalist designs.

We view functionalist and experiential architectures as “architectural ideal types,” emerging from multiple building design dimensions, including, for example, a certain degree of elaborateness, harmony, transparency, and colorfulness. Depending on the exact values on each dimension, an architectural design may be perceived as more or less typical of the functionalist or experiential categories. As a result, in our empirical studies, more than two design types may emerge. For example, based on the specific values of the dimensions, there may be a stark, solid design type that is largely functionalist and a softer version that uses functionalist elements in a more relaxed and balanced way. Similarly, there may be an exaggerated, deconstructive and disruptive experiential design type and a softer, still expressive, yet less aggressive experiential design type.

3. Research framework

Which brand images and personalities might be associated with which architectural design dimensions and design types? In a seminal essay on the semiotics of architecture, the Italian semiotician Umberto Eco distinguished between what he calls the “denotation” of a building (its primary utilitarian function) and the “connotation” of a building (its symbolic meaning) (Eco, 1997). Functionalist architecture, with its simplified and proportional forms, horizontal and vertical lines, and stark, unornamented, rational, and industrial look (Le Corbusier, 1986; Wolfe, 1981), focuses primarily on the denotative function. In contrast, experiential architecture, with its eclectic forms, multiple references, and complex, ornamental, and playful design elements, which are inspired by postmodern ideas (Jencks, 1987), emphasizes the connotative function.

Indeed, functionalist architectural designs gained prominence during early market capitalism, when the modern corporation began to use rational rules with homogenous analytical procedures and implemented a model of production, utility, and efficiency (Weber, 1922/1978), resulting in a “disenchantment of the world” (Weber, 1922/1978). Functionalism thus stood for the capitalist philosophy and projected an overall image of rationality and utilitarianism in its architecture (using denotative elements such as vertical lines and a rational, industrial look). With the emergence of a postmodern society, society and the organization became “(re)enchanted” (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Jenkins, 2000). In addition to rational elements, organizations began to stress hedonic, emotional, creative, and innovative elements (Balmer & Greyser, 2003; Gobe, 2001), and the emerging experiential designs (using connotative elements and an ornamental and playful look) reflected this change in organizations.

As a result, we expect that people form different brand personality impressions about organizations based on the organizations' corporate architecture. Brand personality—defined as the “set of human characteristics associated with the brand” (Aaker, 1997, 347)—captures trait-like associations and inferences about commercial symbols. Perceptions of brand personality can be formed by any direct and indirect contact that a consumer has with a brand (Aaker, 1997; Johar, Sengupta, & Aaker, 2005). Research has shown that brand personality impressions result not only from exposure to the brand name and advertising but also can be formed on the basis of product design (Govers & Schoormans, 2005), typeface design (Henderson et al., 2004), package design (Orth & Malkewitz, 2008), and retail design (D'Astous & Lévesque, 2003; Martineau, 1958). Upon viewing photos of the interior and exterior of homeowners' dwellings, respondents were able to infer the personality of the home owners (Sadalla, Vershure, & Burroughs, 1987). Similarly, we expect that people infer the personality of an organization when shown an image of its corporate building.

While corporate architecture may affect all dimensions of brand personality, we expect two personality dimensions—competence and excitement—to be particularly relevant and formative in the consumer representations and images of the architectural dimensions and designs. The competence dimension, which is strongly associated with traits such as reliable, responsible, dependable and efficient (Aaker, 1997, 351), is conceptually closely related to the ideas of predictability, efficiency and rationality, which following Weber (1922/1978) are essential elements of early capitalist society and inherent values of functionalist architecture. In contrast, the excitement dimension, which is associated with traits such as excitement, imagination, spiritedness and trendiness (Aaker, 1997, 351), appears closely related to postmodernism and is expressed in experiential architecture. Thus, we expect design dimensions and design types to affect corporate personality. In particular, we predict that empirically emerging design dimensions that are characteristic of functionalism (for example, proportional horizontal/vertical lines and lack of elaborateness) and empirically emerging functionalist design types should

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات