

A MARKETING PARADIGM: LEADING ORGANISATIONS THAT CREATE BRAND IDENTITY IN A CONSCIOUSLY AND WELL DESIGNED AESTHETICS-FOCUSED MANNER

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Abstract

Inasmuch as marketing is based on creating value for consumers and receiving values in return, needs of consumers and requests thereof arising incident thereto is of substantial importance for marketers. Should the marketers be oriented to meet the needs of people in societies that have passed to the consumption of experiences for the sake of creating value for consumers by considering this, such an approach will be recognized as a 'value' they look for through the members/ consumers of cited societies and turn back again as a 'value' to businesses in return.

Aesthetics is of the essence in order to create customer value however strategic management of aesthetics, as well as other tools creating value, is also required for ensuring the full potential of the value expected in return of the investment made. The vitality of aesthetics in customers' lives provides opportunities for organizations to appeal to customers through a variety of sensory experiences and thereby benefit both the customers and the organizations through customer satisfaction and loyalty. These opportunities are not limited to industries such as fashion, cosmetics and entertainment that are concerned with aesthetic products as such. They are not limited to exclusive, luxury products for high-end segments. Any organization whatsoever, in any industry, for any customer base, for profit or not for profit, governmental or private, consumer, industrial or service can benefit from using aesthetics.

In this study, the concept of aesthetics is evaluated within the purview of product-focused marketing aesthetics and importance of aesthetics in terms of brand and people, and pioneering businesses that create brand identities knowingly and by planning will be discussed with examples germane thereto.

Keywords: aesthetics, marketing aesthetics, brand identity, the leader brands

INTRODUCTION

The Concept of Aesthetics

Before handling the concept of aesthetics, the etymology of the word should be dealt with. The philosophical efforts about aesthetics date back long before it was gathered under a specific philosophical discipline named as aesthetics. A noun derived from sensing (aisthesis) and perceiving (aisthaneshai) in Greek and claimed to be synonymous with the word "beautiful", which has an acceptable correspondence in terms of linguistics, aesthetics (Ducasse, 1947, p. 166) notes with this aspect that it is a union of rules, a systematic breakdown of sensual perception. Briefly, perception has turned into taste, and taste into aesthetics, which in turn has got out of the individual and found its global identity.

Aesthetics, as a philosophy, is a cornerstone of art. To refer to a few definitions of aesthetics; it is defined in Turkish Language Society's Dictionary as "The theoretical science of beauty in art and in life, with the general laws of artistic creation, sensation of beauty, aesthetic, aesthetics" (<http://www.tdk.gov.tr>, Accessed on 7th July 2013), and in the field of philosophy as "the field of philosophy that deals with beauty and the effects of beauty on human mind and feelings, sensation of beauty, aesthetic".

In philosophical circles, how aesthetic satisfaction is reached is still a matter of debate. According to the basic functional point of view of analytical aesthetics, handling the aesthetic point of view means dealing with the aesthetic value of the object. But philosophers express various opinions about how to provide the aesthetic value. Whereas some philosophers assert that objects provide the aesthetic value by the virtue of having certain structural characteristics that are pleasing for people, such as an official integrity, a good shape (Gestalt), or other attractive characteristics; other philosophers defend that objects provide aesthetic satisfaction by the virtue of referentiality –i.e. which act as symbols that remind other things that make one happy- (Bender and Blocker, 1993, p.211) Aesthetic judgments are judgments based on appreciation. There is not a definite answer to the question: "What makes something aesthetic?" (Clercq, 2002, p.168) The abstract aspect of aesthetics hinders establishing generally accepted criteria and making an objective evaluation. From this aspect, aesthetic judgments are subjective.

The Importance of Aesthetics in Human Life

"Products have also a symbolic value, which generally affect consumption of the same, along with the exchange values that determine their prices, and thus corporations can develop aesthetic-based differentiation skills in order to increase the symbolic value of their products." says Eisenmann.

People, therefore consumers, have certain desires and needs, which they make effort to fulfil and become unhappy if left unfulfilled. But not all the needs of people have the same urgency and importance. Whereas fulfilment of some needs is a requirement for the survival of a human being, some of them turn into a need only after the essential needs of people are fulfilled, and a way is sought for the fulfilment of these. The grading about the place and urgency level of the needs in human life was made by Abraham Maslow. The following pyramid shows Maslow's grading from the essential and compulsory needs to more environment-based needs, fulfilment of which occurs depending on people's level of welfare and development.

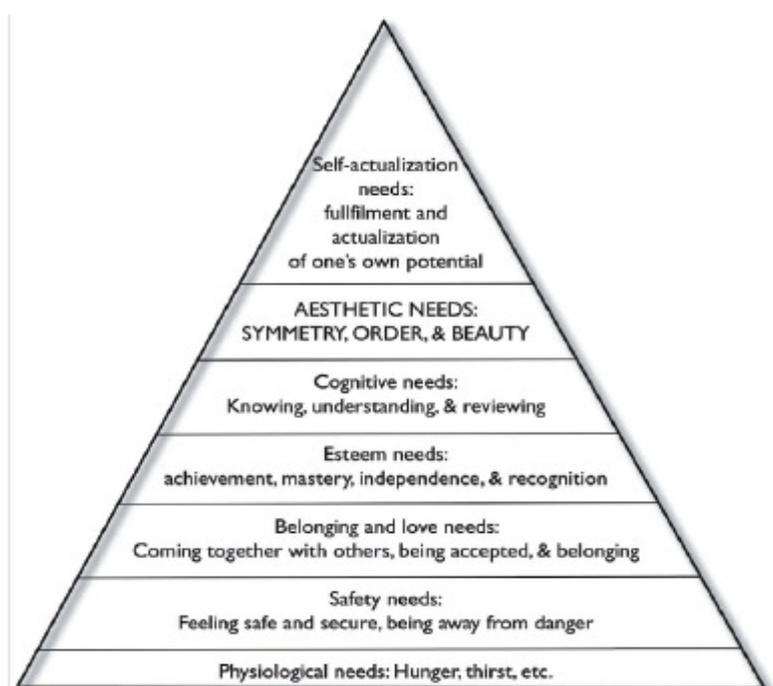


Figure: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Source: Adapted from: Atkinson, R., L. and others, (1993), "Introduction to Psychology", Auburn, W.A, USA: Thriftbooks, p.547

Various regions and societies in the world, or various groups of society within the same community are seen to fulfil or satisfy the needs at various stages out of the above hierarchy of needs. It is of note that whereas certain societies (or certain groups of a society) in the poor regions of the world cannot even fulfil their physical and security needs, in the wealthy societies of the world (or in a wealthy group of a society) people try to satisfy their aesthetic and self-actualization needs. Since marketing was established for creating a value for the consumer and receiving a value from him/her in return, consumers' needs and desires that arise subject to these are very important for the marketers. A good marketer should diagnose the needs and desires of the market segments he/she would like to address in parallel with the society's own marketing purposes, and make submissions that will satisfy these needs and desires, and therefore will mean a value for the consumer.

The fact of consumption society created by the excessive production that increased as a result of the progresses in the production and communication technologies, and consequently the fact of transition from consumption of the goods and services to consumption of experiences clearly show how the societies that might be named as a consumption society (i.e. societies that have started to consume experiences) in Maslow's above given pyramid of hierarchy of needs act to fulfil their which needs, and what consumption of experiences means for them within this context.

Dedifferentiation of products has transferred the needs and thus desires of the consumers from the concrete to the abstract, which means that they shifted from the lower steps of the above hierarchy of needs, which include physical needs, to upper steps, which may be named as psychological, mental, and spiritual, respectively. Therefore, in consumption societies (or

society segments) where a shift has occurred to consumption of experiences, the marketers heading for fulfilling the aesthetics and self-actualization needs of people, taking this into consideration, in order to create value for the consumers, will be perceived by the members/consumers of these societies (or society segments) as the 'value' they have been seeking for, and will again turn back to corporations as a 'value' in return.

“The importance of aesthetics in consumers' lives is to make the organizations influence their customers through various sensorial experiences, and by this way to create opportunities for both the customers and the organizations to provide profit by customer satisfaction and loyalty.” (Schmitt and Simonson, 1997, p.3) Aesthetics has great importance in terms of creating a customer value, but as with other tools that create value, strategic management of aesthetics is necessary for the value expected to be created in return of the investment made in aesthetics to reach its full potential.

Theoretical Approach to Aesthetics and Consumer Surveys

Recently, consumer experts have been emphasizing that due to the increasing impact of the commercial effect over the popular culture, aesthetic image has occupied a significant place in daily consumption. Such expressions might be encountered in many popular articles. (Schmitt and Simonson, 1997, p.28) A number of studies forced the limits of aesthetic discourse in consumer surveys by focusing on subjects like fashion (Murray, 2002, p.129; Thompson and Haytko 1997, p.15), personal care (Askegaard, Gertsen and Langer, 2002, p.793), performance (Deighton, 1992, p.72), visual image (Schroeder, 2002, p.12), and cultural history (Ger and Belk, 1995, p.24). Researchers such as Arnould and Price referred to the elements of aesthetics in their studies, although they did not mention the term of aesthetics. (Brown and Patterson 2000, p.9) Today, thanks to the great interest towards the concept of consumer aesthetics, this concept has sat into the centre of systematic studies.

The term “aesthetics” we use today bears several meanings or components of meaning (Townsend, 1997, p.51). With its first and basic meaning, the sensorial experiences related with fields like art, painting, music, and handcrafts are referred (Holbrook and Zirlin, 1985, p.54; Schroeder and Borgerson, 2002, p.70). In its second meaning, sensorial experiences related with daily objects are included (Forty, 1995, p.36). Its third meaning refers to conceptual aesthetic expressions such as shape and expression, harmony and order, symbolism and image, beauty, taste, and emotion (Carroll, 2001, p.112). The concept of aesthetics in these three definitions is mentioned in any way in consumer surveys. In Kotler's researches (1972, p.46) that begin with the generic concept of marketing, focus is mostly on “art marketing” and “variety marketing”. As also stated by Semenik, art directors have adopted the marketing approach, and have started to adapt the marketing techniques and tools and instruments. Academic studies have focused on the following themes in the field of marketing: The elements that provide consumption of art, the elements effective while purchasing art programs, family life cycle, theatre and cinema, etc. Caldwell and Woodside (2001, p.348) discusses in detail the purchasing and consumption systems to perform arts. Garbarino and Johnson studied on the concepts of trust and commitment in theatre management. Askegaard discussed the image of marketing in the performance of art. Consumer and marketing literature with the theme of aesthetics is not insufficient, though limited. For instance, Schmitt and Simonson (1997, p.32) studied on the concepts of new images and identity through the management of the product and its relationship with

aesthetics in their book. The main discussions in this book focus on how the brand is related with the product, what kind of effects product details can have on the consumers' sensorial experiences, and in what way this interaction system influences product's attraction. Thus, the aesthetic attraction in submission of the product, i.e. the creative effect of the product is emphasized. In consumer's view, daily objects have the power to satisfy the aesthetic requirements of the consumer through sensorial experiences (Heilburn, 2002, p.569). Consumption of the products in experiential style is a requirement for experiences of taste; i.e. the experience of consumption is in a way for fantasy, feeling, and taste. The experience of pleasure –also defined as liking or getting joy- is a kind of aesthetic reaction that induces multiple sensorial, fantasy, and emotional experiences. Hoolbrook and Hirschman's studies help us comprehend the experiential, symbolic, and hedonic aesthetic properties of the products. (Heilburn, 2002, p.570)

Other recent studies have focused on the issue of consumption of art. Related with the experiential aspect of consumption, the symbolic structure of consumption was also handled. The studies focused on symbolic, ritual, hedonic, and pragmatic consumption behaviours show how the individuals handle the past meanings, how they approach to future meanings, and how they bring together today's cultural structures, such as family, religion, gender, age, and tradition. Such studies and studies focused on similar consumption experiences deal with the consumer within context of aesthetics. The facts like architectural and monumental details, photographs, product designs, and layouts provide multiple-sensorial stimulations such as imaginative power, cultural focus, special style, and recreation, which satisfy the needs of the consumers. Some other studies enriched our insight about the concept of aesthetics by discussing the production and consumption of cultural products such as films, works of art, written works, and advertisement texts. These studies addressed to issues about consumption and consumer's culture, such as materialism, nostalgia, and cultural myths.

Aesthetic Consumption Model

Aesthetic consumption model is defined as the sensorial experiences that arise during consumption of the daily objects with an aesthetic quality. The elements in the model were coded from A to E. For Dickie (1971, p.132), aesthetics contains two types of experiences: Daily life experiences (A) and artistic experiences (B). In general, consumers either have artistic experience alone, or have experience by bringing both experiences together, i.e. unified aesthetic conscience (C). Some consumers have their consumption experiences with only one type. Some consumers do not have their experiences with that kind of split-offs. No matter what the consumer's approach is, aesthetic experience is a guide in the formation of the consumer's identity, and ensures the consumers to give a meaning to their lives (D). This leads the consumer to come out as the aesthetic subject (E). The components of this model will be discussed below in details.

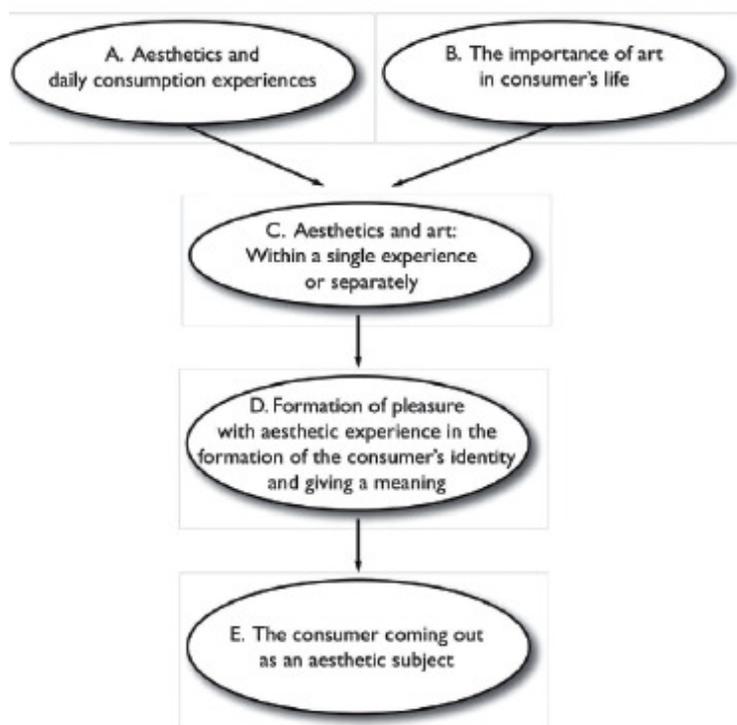


Figure: Aesthetic Consumption Model

Source: Alladi Venkatesha & Laurie A. Meamber, “The Aesthetics of Consumption and The Consumer as an Aesthetic Subject”, *Consumption Markets & Culture*, Vol. 11, No.1, (March 2008), p.45–70

Aesthetics and Daily Consumption Experiences

In the literature related with consumer surveys, consumption of experiential type of products does not only take place as a fact that solves requirement problems, but it is also presented as hedonic or pleasurable experiences (Arnould and Price, 1993, p.24; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982, p.92). In some studies, in a bit different way from hedonic oriented consumption, importance of consumption experiences for the consumer and its effects to acquisition of identity are also handled (Thompson, 1990, p.61). Rantala and Lehtonen (2001, p.63), who took the concept of shopping as a daily consumer behaviour, state that objects take place in a number of consumer practice as a reflection of the traditional aesthetic point of view. Therefore, any shopping that includes many daily items -clothing, house decoration, etc.- bears aesthetic elements.

The Concept of Marketing Aesthetics and Brand Identity

The term “marketing aesthetics” took its place in the terminology, as the marketing of sensorial experiences within the company or in brand output, which contributes to the identity of the organization or brand.

Current communication environments are multimedia, multichannel, multi-sensory, and digital. Communication, travel, products, and services have been globalizing swiftly, more people live in cities throughout the world compared to old times, consumer lifestyles and preferences –especially among the youth- go on to exist in an intense, short-lived, and

variable way. All these environments present the ideal conditions for the marketing aesthetics. (Schmitt and Simonson, 1997, p.18) Aesthetics is the art of establishing communication through senses, creating reactions without words, and the way of making the world around us special. Accordingly, aesthetic values are the most important tool of creating a product or service image. Aesthetics is related with visual elements, and Aristotle's motto "perception begins with vision" forms the basis of the marketing aesthetics. For in occupying a place in people's minds and being remembered for a long time, visual factors, especially shapes and colours, are very significant.

It is possible to say briefly that the marketing aesthetics of a brand is a successful brand identity design. Identity appears in 1990s as a weighed conceptualization in the marketing communication literature. For instance, International Corporate Identity Group defines the identity as a differentiating frame that distinguishes the brand from its competitors, and reflects the ethos, targets, and values of the brand. (International Corporate Identity Group, 2007) Nowadays, conceptualization of identity comes out as the beginning point of strategic communication planning with terms like brand identity, and corporate identity. In terms of brand management theory, the brand identity is taken as a reference frame that helps to determine the meaning, orientation, and purpose for the brand. Aaker (1996) defines the brand identity as a set of "unique" associations of brand. The important concept in this definition is the "associations". For brand associations are (every) "thing" associated with the brand in the minds of stakeholders and consumers. Therefore, the brand identity covers all aspects of the brand, and calls for the requirement of giving importance to the whole, rather than the pieces of the brand.

For Aaker, the brand identity is seen as an expression of the subjectivity of the brand, long-term purposes and targets, continuity, values, basic beliefs, and distinguishing marks, and it provides the brand with a direction, purpose, and meaning. Brand identity should help establishment of a relationship between the brand and the customer by creating a functional, emotional, and self-expressive value suggestion. (Aaker, 1996, p.68)

A strong brand identity has a multi-directional and multi-dimensional structure that covers the physical structure, culture, relationship structure, customer structure, and self image. In fact, a strong brand identity forms the basis of the marketing aesthetics. Kapferer evaluates the concept of identity according to three properties, namely as durability, integrity, factualism, and presents the brand identity with a hexagonal identity prism, as shown in the below figure.

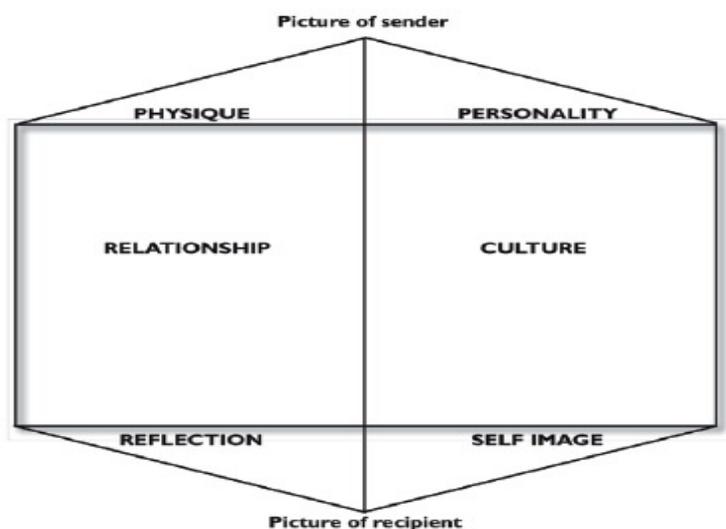


Figure: Brand Identity Prism

Source: Kapferer, J.N. (1992), Strategic Brand Management: New Approaches to Creating and Evaluating Brand Equity. Kogan Page, London, U.K

A corporation that analyzes its customers, competitors, market, and itself should first determine its brand identity clearly, while creating a brand. These are the existing specifications, contributions, benefits, performance, quality, experience, and value when it has the brand.

A product or service brand identity has all the characteristics of that product/service, created either consciously or unconsciously. After the identity is planned strategically and realized by the marketers, and then introduced to the target mass, the brand's image is formed in the eyes of the consumers. In order to ensure this image to be strong and permanent, all the elements that constitute the identity should be presented "consciously" and in a well designed way. By this means, the marketing aesthetics of the product/service will be created.

Leading Organisations Focus on Aesthetics

Several smart organizations have gained a competitive advantage through aesthetics. Absolut, Benetton, Turkish Airlines are all companies whose deliver multiple benefits to their customers. Absolut is a vodka that performs well in blind tests with vodka drinkers. Benetton and Mavi multiple product lines across its different store names deliver quality casual clothing. Turkish Airlines is known for its superb operations, sound financial management, and attentive service. But product and service quality, superb craftsmanship and engineering, or excellent operations and financial management can not explain the success of these products and companies in today's competitive markets. A focus on core competencies, quality and customer value would not have been enough to create an irresistible appeal. Each company found a powerful point of differentiation through the use of aesthetics to create positive overall customer impressions that depict the multifaceted personality of the company or brand.

For example, the *Turkish Airlines* began its journey with 5 planes 80 years ago and today it continues the journey thereof with a fleet of 218 (passenger and cargo) planes. According to Skytrax 2013 awards it is Europe's best airline and the world's 9th best airline. Turkish Airlines is a Star Alliance member and currently making flights to a total of 221 destinations, 186 of which are international destinations and 35 of which are domestic destinations. This flight network has made Turkish Airlines 3rd in Europe and 7th in the world in the list of airways with the biggest flight network. A major factor in the company's success is its systematic planning of consistent aesthetic style that is carried through in everything the company does. What is most impressive about companies such as Turkish Airlines and Absolut is their appearance in mature markets. Both have been successful by not doing what others have been doing, by leaving the traditional marketing to their competitors and by differentiating themselves through aesthetic experiences.

Aesthetics is relevant for producers of industrial goods as well. Like other firms, industrial firms create their image to customers through their products but also through packaging, brochures, delivery vans, trade advertising etc. Differences between top-quality firms and less successful ones are immediately evident, not only in the machinery and organization of the work flow, but also in the overall appearance of the factory floor, the lighting, the uniforms of the workers, the "sound environment" –in short, in the aesthetics of the factory. Traditional organizations provide products – the proverbial "selling the steak". But it has always been the case that good marketers, and particularly today's market-driven, customer-oriented organizations, focus on the perceived benefit of the product – "selling the sizzle".

For example, *Absolut* knew that the traditional ingredients of successful brands were no longer enough to lift a product above its competitors. The willingness to market its aesthetics moved Absolut into its enviable market position. Absolut's success followed a well-integrated identity campaign, termed "smart, showy, sassy, sophisticated, sometimes silly, though always stylish" that turned Absolut's weaknesses into strengths. In the aesthetics strategy pursued by Absolut, the commonplace word that was the brand name and the product's distinctively shaped bottle became the center of an artistically imaginative campaign. The Absolut identity is cool, cutting-edge, yet playful and irreverent. The product is associated with a fashionable, arty scene, but without hype or pretension. In stores and on bar shelves the minimalist clear bottle, with its long, wide neck and the words Absolut Vodka spelled out on the glass in evenly sized capital letters, stands out. The silver-and-blue Absolut package design reinforces the distinct product image- streamlined, straightforward, sophisticated. New product lines such as Absolut Kurant, Absolut Peppar etc., are introduced naturally with minor appearance shifts such as a new lettering color, anchored by the stable simplicity of the ABSOLUT name on the bottle, the signature minimalist clear bottle and the trendy advertising campaigns that link the product to a hip, creative, high-end culture. (Simon and Simith, 2007, p:5-6) In a nutshell, Absolut's sassy image is created through a sophisticated strategy that mixes consistent and simple refinement with planned and controlled unconventional executions. The Absolut campaigns has revolutionized liquor marketing through its aesthetics strategy.

Another example is *Google*. It was the world's most valuable in 2008 and the value thereof was estimated to be about 100 billion dollars. Moreover, this value according to Millward

Brown Optimor increased by 16% over compared with the previous year. People no longer were looking for something on the Internet but they were simply “googling”. In other words google has become a generic name in the online search industry. It is a part of everyday life today. The brand at every opportunity stresses that "it will never be satisfied with the best". Larry Page, one of the partners, writes the following on the company website: "Perfect search engine understands what you mean very well and gives you exactly what you desire." This is the cornerstone of google culture and it finds the true meaning thereof with values directed to the brand. The brand is based on five basic pillars as: "Search, discover and create innovation, establish communication-show and share, be mobile and ensure your computer to work better". The brand that perfectly analyzes the desires and needs of consumers and that aims to satisfy foregoing has created the brand identity structure thereof on the basis of cited pillars and manages it strategically. It is one of the unique brands that utilize the aesthetics of marketing in this respect literally.

Turkcell, Turkey 's first GSM, 2G and 3G operator, is a good example incident to the aesthetics of product-oriented marketing. Turkcell, a giant in the telecommunications sector in Turkey, is the market leader in five of the nine countries in which it operates. Turkcell, has become one of the brands with the highest brand awareness and brand value thanks to the its wide coverage area thereof in Turkey and a wide range of services used abroad being able to respond to the communication needs of its customers with high quality in 2012. This result is without doubt due to the fact that the identity of the brand is strategic and is well-designed. The brand's logo, colors, function, services, brand characteristics, culture presents the image and identity in an integrated manner and reflects the brand identity.

In addition to providing banking services, the expansive vision of *Akbank*, one of the powerful figures in the banking sector in Turkey, includes investments ranging from arts events geared toward social progress such as jazz, theatre and contemporary arts to environmental protection practices such as the Carbon Disclosure Project. As a consequence of its effective risk management policies and its successful performance, Akbank was assigned the highest financial strength rating and baseline credit assessment that can be assigned within the Turkish banking sector by Moody's as well as the highest viability rating in the sector by Fitch Ratings. As well as the aforementioned success in the industry the brand identity thereof the advertising campaigns especially in recent years strengthened the brand. It has become one of the brands with the highest value and brand recognition in 2012 thanks to the personality of the brand prepared and presented in an integrated way, the image, the services offered, the culture, the service quality of the employees, the color, brand characters and strong brand promotion activities.

RESULT

Dedifferentiation of products has transferred the needs and thus desires of the consumers from the concrete to the abstract, which means that they shifted from the lower steps of the above hierarchy of needs, which include physical needs, to upper steps, which may be named as psychological, mental, and spiritual, respectively. Therefore, in consumption societies (or society segments) where a shift has occurred to consumption of experiences, the marketers heading for fulfilling the aesthetics and self-actualization needs of people, taking this into consideration, in order to create value for the consumers, will be perceived by the members/

consumers of these societies (or society segments) as the ‘value’ they have been seeking for, and will again turn back to corporations as a ‘value’ in return.

Any corporation that analyzes its customers, competitors, and itself should first determine its brand identity in a clear way while creating a brand. Brand identity, in the literature, expresses the overall services rendered by corporations to their customers. This is the value about its existing specifications, contributions, benefits, performance, quality, experience, and the value when the brand is owned.

However, should all these identity elements be not managed strategically and created through businesses the brand identity can be very different from the identity, image and brand value the brand desires to create. To this end, the businesses should create and manage brand identities consciously. Strong brand identity has a multi-faceted structure including the physical structure, the cultural structure, the relationship structure, customer structure and the identity image. An already strong brand identity creates the basis of the marketing aesthetics. In a nutshell, it can be also said that a marketing aesthetics of a city is the design of a successful brand identity.

Today, businesses follow various forms of differentiation ways in product/service promotion with an eye to create competitive advantage. Aesthetic values are the most important one of these ways of differentiation.

Today's successful brands that employ aesthetics in a designed way for the purposes of differentiation (the example brands given above are a few of them) manage the brand identities designed consciously thereby and provide sustainability thereof to survive in a highly competitive environment. The concept of identity exhibits a dynamic structure affected through changing economic, sociological and cultural structures. As such, they need to be managed strategically. There are international and national brands which can do foregoing successfully. Product life cycle curve of the products of these brands are longer, their brand values are higher, their images and identities are in the way they want to reflect and brand dependency ratio that they create in consumers is much higher.

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