Auto Body Design Based on Brand Identification

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Abstract. The auto body design possesses the function of brand identification, which is one of main means to build brand image. There is a very important question needed to be answered that how the auto designers integrate brand culture and core values into auto body designing so that the typical styles and features of brands can remain consistent and gain lasting acceptance among consumers. This paper will discuss and explore brand identification, brand culture and their relations with auto body designing.

Introduction

There are two important factors people would take into consideration when they purchase automobiles. One is aesthetic taste of auto body styling. The other is the sense of belonging for some specific auto brand. People love the beautiful and fashionable automobile and their choices of autos can reflect their social, financial and spiritual statues and pursuits. With the development of auto industry, the auto body design becomes increasingly exquisite and the designing level keeps improving. It is a trend that auto body design will develop towards familization and branding more quickly today. The visual features of auto body design which can arouse consumers’ direct association of specific brands are called brand features in designing (in short, these are called as brand features). Brand features now have been one of the vital elements for market competition in auto industry. So it is very necessary to research on how to design auto body and use visual means to convey brand specialty, philosophy and culture in order to fully realize brand identification function and highlight brand images.

The Function of Brand Identification in Auto Body Designing

According to business dictionary, brand is unique design, sign, symbol, words, or a combination of these, employed in creating an image that identifies a product and differentiates it from its competitors. Over time, this image becomes associated with a level of credibility, quality, and satisfaction in the consumer's mind. Thus brands help harried consumers in crowded and complex marketplace, by standing for certain benefits and value. So auto body design is also one of important means to realize brand identification and it should be taken into branding system. Therefore, systematical designing and attentions to the wholeness are essential to complete brand image and rich branding. With fast development of auto market, many major auto manufacturers are striving to build their own unique brand images with their own featured body styling. Brand has two practical functions: identification and distinction, which demand the auto body designing should possess distinctive, beautiful and strong visual impacts as well as obvious distinguishing makers in order to differentiate them from others, leave deep impressions on consumers and promote sales.

When speaking of designing Hyundai and Kia automobile, Hyundai and Kia’s director, global designing center CEO and auto master designer Peter Schreyer stated that designing is vital for creating and developing a brand because it is closely related to brand image. Designing is the embodiment of brand consistence. Take Kia as an example. Peter Schreyer declared that no matter where the Kia’s cars are seen, they can be identified as Kia’s at the first sight, which means the designing can highly promote branding and should be laid great stress and investment on.
Through the development of many major auto brands, most of these brands all along keep their stability and consistence in their designing and make their design stylish. To create a brand needs a comparatively long process. During the process, a brand gradually form their own unique style. Once the style or image has been set up, it is not possible to change it in a very short time. Only in this way, series new auto models launched continuously can still leave people consistent impressions, which can be called signature of auto brand. When stable auto styles have formed, brands can be recognizable, present consumers company strengths and finally gain acceptance, fame, consumers and their loyalty.

Relation between Brand Culture and Body Designing

From the perspective of brandology, brand culture is the base of branding. Brand image is visual expression of brand culture. The two are closely related and connected into the whole. As an essential way of presenting brand image, auto body styling is closely connected with brand culture. Different auto styling are actual carriers of brand cultures.

Brand culture connotation includes brand name, brand logo, brand history, brand goals, brand value and emotional appeals. Based on brand culture, every auto brand has been forming their own brand positioning which brings out many unique designing laws. These designing laws and philosophies are integrated into the whole auto body styling including outer outlines and regional details in order to endow the automobile with characteristic brand-related charm. For instance, beauty, vigor, reliability and innovation are core values of Peugeot so that the priority of Peugeot designing center is to make these value visualized in body shaping and styling. The same thing happens on Chevrolet. In Chevrolet, all autos look very stylish, young, energetic and sophisticated which are exactly embodiment of brand cultures of Chevrolet.

Brand cultures integrated into the auto designing can also help improve brand identification. The auto designing styles and characteristics should convey emotional and cultural information which brands want to present to the consumers and the public. Therefore, auto designers should convert brand cultures to recognizable visual semantic symbols and semiotic signs in auto body designing by using theories of designing semantics. This can create some inner bonds to connect auto body designing with brand cultures so that aesthetic standards, life styles and tastes which auto brands want to create can be fully expressed and concisely recognized and accepted by consumers. This process can be called emotional interaction between designers and consumers. (Figure1)

Visual Features of Auto Body Designing

The formation of designing styles cannot be achieved without abstracting products family characters and brand features and combining them into the whole designing. Brand features are the most important parts to form brand styles and present brand cultures. These are also outer elements which can be visualized and recognized most effectively and directly by consumers. So here brand features refer to the most distinguishing visual markers in designing such as lines, outlines, colors, proportions and details of auto exterior appearance and inner decorations.
For examples, the latest generation of Ford have new radiator grilles with big-mouth shape, sharp headlights and statue-like auto body surface, which are typical features of Ford family and can be easily recognized.

**Evolution and Inheritance of Brand Features**

Many auto brands have formed their own body styling features in the long designing practice, which have been considered as genes of auto designing. When the manufacturers update the old generation, these features or genes will be saved and highlighted in order to realize a sense of family and branding, which is one of the most vital and popular means to create brand images and raise sales. In this way, the identical images and consistent recognition can be gained in generation changes. With the passage of time, these features will also change with the changes of society and aesthetic attitudes and trends in the society. Some auto manufacturers will make big adjustments about these genes but they still remain some as inheritance to some degree. According to related researches, it is found that the most distinctive features in auto brands are always embodied in outlines of side body, the shape of windows, auto belt lines, rear mirrors and headlights as well as engine vents lines, engine bonnet lines, rear lights lines and other main lines. For example, unique curve lines on the side doors of Buick are the most typical brand features and can be dated from 1940s. Today the curve lines have been the designing signatures and classic Buick styling elements used in nearly every Ford sedans, which interpret elegance and muscular sense greatly highlighted by Buick. (Figure2)

![Figure 2. The belt line of Buick—unique curve lines.](image)

According to branding strategy, every auto brand should take identification, generation changes and family inheritance into body designing in order to maintain their blood and sense of family. Otherwise, it will result in the confusion and barriers of brand identification which can cause great wastes in product explorations.

**Semiotic Theory of Auto Body Designing**

Signs or symbols refer to the media or carriers for something. All human thoughts and information communications rely on signs. Symbols or signs are consisted of signs and signified, namely, substantial media and their psychic representations.

Semiotics(also called semiotic studies) is the study of meaning-making, the study of sign processes and meaningful communication. This includes the study of signs and sign processes indication, designation, likeness, analogy, metaphor, symbolism, signification, and communication. The semiotic tradition explores the study of signs and symbols as a significant part of communications. In auto designing domain, semiotics can refer to study of the signs’ essence, developing and changing rules, implications, relation with human activities. According to the semiotic definition of signs, designing features can be seen as signs which stand for brand cultural information. In the process of inheritance and development, brands gradually own their own visual language which reflect brand aesthetic tastes and core values. These visual language possess typical features of “sign”. According to semiotic theory, signs are systematical. Therefore, to present brand features better, designers should pay great attention to the system which means the designing should be based on the whole and balance the relations among different details and between details and the whole. In this way, the agreement and consistency of the styling can be greatly improved and the information and semantic meanings of visual language can be conveyed more effectively.

Skoda can be seen as a classic example to present systematization. The body modeling impresses people dynamic and passionate beauty. The curve lines of outlines, detail components and C- element
all agree with each other harmoniously so that the whole body styling creates a strong sense of the wholeness. (Figure 3)

![Figure 3: C-element in Skoda Superb’s designing.](image)

**The Application of Logos in Body Designing**

Auto brand logo is the symbol of auto brand, which is the most direct medium to present history of specific auto brands and is full of symbolic meanings. Some auto brands formed their own special features of their styling by using logo elements in the body modeling and it turns out to be effective. Now it becomes one of most common designing methods to fulfill the function of brand identification. The shared features or elements not only can be identified effectively but also can create the more direct connections between brand logo and brand body modeling. By viewing body shape and style, consumers can generate association of auto brands and gain better understanding of brand culture. The visual elements abstracted from logo can be symbolized and are mainly used in the outline of logos and auto inner designing.

For examples, Renault, Mazda, Peugeot and Citroen all employ this method to present brand features. The hexagon of Renault, can be seen everywhere in body styling. Their outlines of body sides are similar to that of brand logo. The headlights and tail lights employ hexagon shapes as well as rear mirrors, Radiator grille, door handles, wheel hubs, fog lambs and some inner decorations so that the whole auto have a harmonious styles. (Figure 4)

![Figure 4: The elements from the logo of Renault Koleos in designing.](image)

**Conclusions**

All in all, it is significant for forming and keeping brand images by integrating brand cultures into auto body designing in order to maintain consistence and continuity in brand styling. To promote unique and specific branding, it requires designers use recognizable, symbolized visual language to convey brand cultural information to consumers, present the cream of brand culture, make designing features distinctive and unify details and the whole designing.

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