by Raudhah Rahman

YOUR *(small yet fierce)* GUIDEBOOK

Navigating Identity, Culture, and Power.

for Shapers of Tomorrow, Dismantlers of Today. Learners of the past

⟶ UNPACK BRANDING

An Introduction

Why unpack branding?

In this guide, I'll chat about branding, sharing examples from growing up between cultures. Being an "in-betweener" has really shaped how I think about branding, especially going from repeatedly colonized lands to now living on stolen land.

Even though I don't have a formal education in design or websites, I've developed a passion for them during the pandemic. This has led me to help others navigate the online world. I'll talk about my approach to branding, which is more about making connections than just chasing profits, and give some insights into how branding began.

How this eBook is laid out:

The eBook is your branding partner, here to guide and inspire DIY-ers on their path to becoming mindful brand creators. Summarized with historical insights, thoughtful prompts, and real-world examples, it's a practical tool to help you navigate the branding process sustainably.

With quotes and stories, I aim to offer a new take on branding that speaks to those tired of the same old rules and stories.

Flow of things

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The origins of branding.

To understand branding's impact and responsibility, we must first look into its origins. The word "brand" derives from the Old Norse word "brenna," meaning "to burn." Historically, branding was used to mark ownership, particularly on livestock. This practice, seen in the burning of symbols onto animals, indicated ownership and was a precursor to modern branding. Here are three brief examples to give us a historical context around this origin.

EXAMPLE 1

Ownership and Signifiers:

In the 17th century, brand marks such as those used by monarchies and trading companies like the South Sea Company, were marks of ownership and power. These often symbolized control over resources and people, including the trade and enslavement of individuals.

EXAMPLE 2

Colonization and Trade:

Dutch imperialism in Southeast Asia and its impact on indigenous populations is a significant yet often overlooked aspect of the history of branding. The colonization of lands and exploitation of people for resources, such as palm oil plantations in Malaysia, contributed to the wealth of colonizers and shaped global trade patterns.

EXAMPLE 3

Modern Branding:

The pre-cursor to what we know now as branding, starts with the origins of block printing in China in the third century, which spread to Egypt, Asia, and eventually Europe. Gutenberg's use of the printing press in the 15th century revolutionized information dissemination, leading to modern advertising and marketing.

The section also highlights how branding has influenced cultural norms, such as the association of colors with gender, and how marketing can perpetuate harmful colonial ideologies, as seen in beauty standards in Southeast Asia. It emphasizes the need to critically examine the impact of branding and marketing on society.

How does understanding the historical context of branding inform our approach to creating logos and marks today?

Write your answer here...

In what ways can brands avoid perpetuating patterns of colonization and exploitation in their branding practices?

Write your answer here...

The impact of branding on culture

Branding's impact on culture is profound, shaping how we perceive ourselves and others. It is a heavy responsibility, one that requires introspection and a commitment to positive change. As we delve into this topic, it's important to reflect on how we can find hope and drive transformation in the branding industry.

When confronted with the history of branding, it's natural to question our role in designing brands and websites. In this chapter, I share some quotes from people along with questions that has cumulatively informed my approach to branding whilst in tension.

"I think it is healing behavior, to look at something so broken and see the possibility and wholeness in it." - Adrienne Maree Brown in Emergent Strategy

How can we find hope and drive change knowing the impact branding has on society and narratives.

Write your answer here...

"Business, corporations and brands are not people, but people comprise and create them " - Archetypes in Branding

How can this knowing guide us in recognizing our role in creating and shaping brands, institutions, and culture?

Write your answer here...

"Design is not just what it appears to be; it is also an expression of our cultural life"

- Ismiaji Cahyono
Creative Director of SUNVisual and Bureau Chief of Desain Grafis Indonesia

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How can we ensure that our designs honor and celebrate diverse cultural experiences, moving away from a homogenized, Western-centric approach?

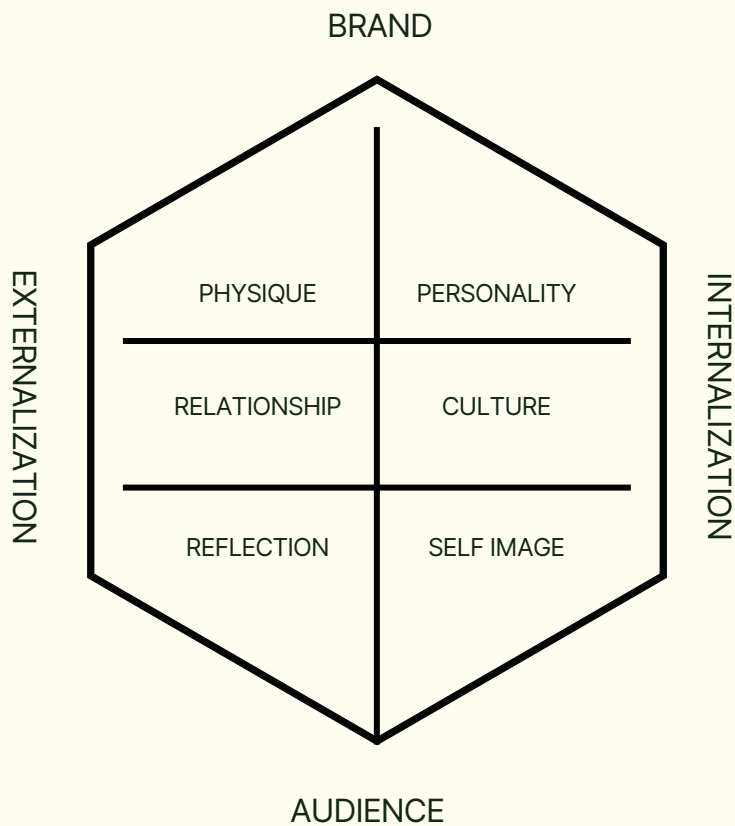Write your answer here...

How can we shift our approach to branding to positively influence cultural perceptions and behaviors?

Write your answer here...

Responsibility in Branding

Brands play a significant role in shaping cultural narratives and societal norms. Understanding how branding intersects with the cycle of socialization and the analysis of power is crucial for brands to act responsibly and authentically, especially in times of crisis.

BRAND

EXTERNALIZATION

PHYSIQUE

PERSONALITY

RELATIONSHIP

CULTURE

REFLECTION

SELF IMAGE

INTERNALIZATION

AUDIENCE

FRAMEWORK 1
The Identity Prism

The Identity Prism, a framework developed by French marketing expert Jean-Noël Kapferer, offers a holistic view of branding by considering six dimensions: physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image. I adapted this framework by examining each dimension through the lenses of the cycle of socialization and the analysis of power, brands can understand their impact on individuals and society.

An example for how the first two categories are adapted through the lens of Cycles of Socialization (Harro, 97) and Analysis of Power (*Skill in Action):

- **Phyisque and Power:** Brands that use physical attributes to reinforce societal beauty standards may perpetuate harmful stereotypes. This aligns with the cycle of socialization, where individuals internalize societal norms and expectations.
- **Personality and Socialization:** Brands that promote certain personality traits as desirable may influence how individuals perceive themselves and others. This reflects the analysis of power, where brands wield influence over cultural narratives and perceptions.

How does your brand's physique and personality reflect societal norms and power dynamics? How does this align with or challenge the cycle of socialization?

Write your answer here...

*I first learned about Analysis of Power through Skill in Action.

In what ways can your brand challenge or disrupt harmful stereotypes and narratives? How can this contribute to a more equitable distribution of power?

Write your answer here...

We've explored the multifaceted world of branding, delving into its historical roots, its profound impact on culture, and the essential role it plays in shaping identities and perceptions.

Thank you for joining us on this exploration of branding. I hope you continue to engage critically with the world of branding and find inspiration in creating brands that are meaningful, inclusive, and impactful.
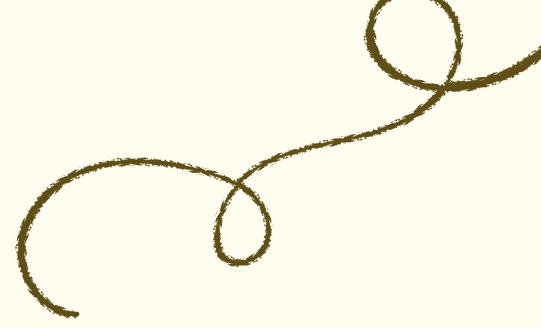
Our time for this eBook has come to an end.

And the learning continues. Ready to dive deeper into understanding your own brand and how to translate that into your visual identity? Take the next step by answering 18 questions in the Through Line Workbook. This questionnaire is designed to help you apply the concepts discussed in this eBook to your own visual identity and brand strategy. Gain valuable insights and actionable steps to stay consistently growing in human values.

Click here to get the workbook.

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