

# The Role of Design in Establishing a Brand: Three in-depth Case Studies

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## 1. Introduction

The user-centered approach often used by designers has value in developing a brand. However, the field of branding today lacks a thorough understanding of user-centered design principles. There also exists a communication gap between design and brand development teams. Previous experience in business and present understanding of design helped me see the value of design in marketing, specially branding. To illustrate this, three brands Absolut Vodka, Intel, and Starbucks— market leaders in their respective industries— have been studied to emphasize the role of design in branding.

## 2. Definition of Terms

### *Marketing*

A social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others. [1]

### *Brand*

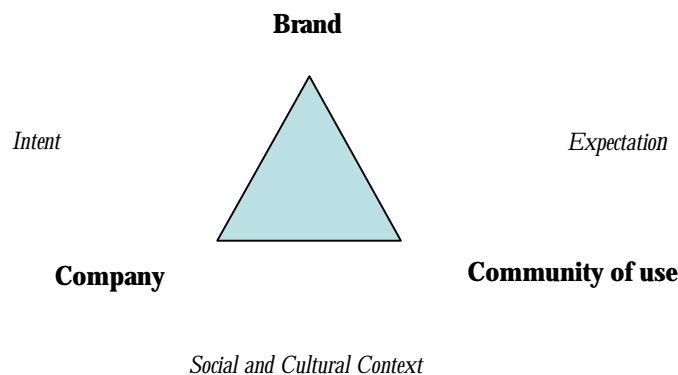
A brand can be defined as a value proposition and a contract between user and product experience. A brand is also a name, term, sign, symbol or design. [2]

### *Brand equity*

Consists of five asset categories: brand awareness, brand personality, brand loyalty, perceived quality and value, perceived quality and value, brand associations. [3]

### *User-centered design*

This approach takes into account user feedback to make better product and brand decisions, as opposed to decisions solely based on intuition and market research.



## 2.1 Hypothesis

The value of employing the user-centered approach to developing a brand, maybe inferred from previous experiences in business and current understanding of design. Design can strengthen a brand by adding value to the experiential and perceptual levels of a brand. To test the hypothesis, three brands have been selected— Absolut Vodka, Intel, and Starbucks— as they represent diverse brand situations and are market leaders in their respective product categories. No primary information regarding the process applied to their brand development is available.

However, close investigation of these brands reveals the role of design in making them successful. The three brands have been chosen on two criteria: extent of product visibility and consumer interaction with the brand.

## 3. Relationship between Design and Branding

The design process aims to deliver and fulfill user needs by providing user-centered product attributes and service features. The result of this process is embodied in a brand. The brand is communicated to the consumer through a value proposition. Design helps communicate the value proposition by building a strong user experience around the brand. Also, content design, tone of the advertisements, and promotion fall into the realm of design.

For a brand to succeed, the product offerings a result of the design process must be effective and consistent. The product attributes must perform and deliver to reinstate the value proposition. Design and brand work synergistically to create a strong value proposition, which a customer can associate with.

Brands, which manifest a strong relationship with design, are some of the most successful in their product categories and respective industry. Examples of such brands are Absolut Vodka, Starbucks and Intel. Design has played a significant role in making these brands successful. Also, a well conceived brand strategy has helped position the products in the appropriate market segment and target the right customer base.

To demonstrate the role of design in establishing a brand, two methods— value opportunity analysis (design perspective) and the case study method (business perspective)— are to all three brands. The two diverse methods provide results that validate the role of design in creating a brand.



## **3.1 Definition of Methodologies**

### **Value Opportunity Analysis**

To establish the relationship between design and branding, the three brands have been mapped on the value opportunities chart. [4] Value opportunities are qualitative measures relating to a product or mapped on a chart. Each attribute is expressed as low, medium, or high. If a product did not meet (or target) any level of that attribute, no line is drawn. There are originally seven classes of value opportunities: emotion, ergonomics, aesthetics, identity, impact, core technology, and quality. Each contribute to the overall experience of the product and relate to the value characteristics of useful, usable and desirable. Below the chart are listed profit impact, brand impact, and extendibility. Although not VOs, they are included as they indicate overall success of the product.

The chart has been adapted with its existing classes to map brands. Since brands have experiential and perceptual layers, an eighth class, attitude, is added to the existing seven. The new class consists of three attributes: perception, cognitive, and intent. This was done to better analyze brands. VO's define the semantics of the product and its associated brand characteristics, resulting in that value proposition. A successful brand must connect with the personal values of the customer.

The initial impression of the brand stimulates short-term purchase. The long-term comfort, performance, interaction, and satisfaction are the forces that build brand loyalty. The following are the value opportunity analysis charts for all three brands:

**Value Opportunity Analysis of ABSOLUT VODKA**

		Low	Med	High
<b>EMOTIONS</b>	adventure			
	independence			
	security			
	credibility			
	power			
<b>ERGONOMICS</b>	handle			
	comfort			
	ease of use			
<b>ATTITUDE</b>	ads			
	perceptions			
<b>AESTHETICS</b>	visual			
	auditory			
	tactile			
	olfactory			
<b>IDENTITY</b>	point in time			
	sense of place			
<b>IMPACT</b>	social			
	environmental			
<b>CORE TECH.</b>	reliable			
	enabling			
<b>QUALITY</b>	craftsmanship			
	durability			
<b>PROFIT IMPACT</b>				
<b>BRAND IMPACT</b>				
<b>EXTENDABLE</b>				

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VOA of Absolut Vodka.

**Value Opportunity Analysis of ABSOLUT VODKA**

The brand has been established through a highly successful advertising campaign.

Extent of product visibility: High      Extent of product interaction: Medium

<b>EMOTIONS</b>	adventure	Implies in the ad it evokes and evokes a sense of mystery.
	independence	The brand image is a strong edge and top. Appeals to individuals with a high sense of independence and provides a sense of freedom.
	security	NA
	credibility	Use of many Action designs and pop art to represent the bottle and create an appealing look.
	power	It is a position brand and represents high-end culture. Its experimental and edgy image gives consumers a feeling of ego - status.
<b>ERGONOMICS</b>	handle	The brand image placed directly on the bottle makes it easy to grip and the shape of the bottle is appealing.
	comfort	It is easy to carry and use.
	ease of use	It is simple to open when compared to a champagne bottle.
<b>ATTITUDE</b>	ads	Use of playful illustrations, movies and surrealism. E.g. ABSOLUT ATTENTION (communication optical illusion), ABSOLUT SOFTWARE and ABSOLUT GLASSING. Shows creativity through Master ads of Absolut, fiction, concepts.
	visual	Intelligent graphical treatment of a variety of subjects creates rich visual with bottle always at the center of ad.
	auditory	NA.
<b>AESTHETICS</b>	tactile	The colors and materials of the ads create a strong sense of tangibility. E.g. ABSOLUT INAGINATION, ABSOLUT SECURITY and ABSOLUT LAURENCE.
	olfactory	It is an open drink, but no smell.
	taste	It is an open drink, but no taste.
<b>IDENTITY</b>	point in time	Brand has a very visual system through its consistent theme.
	sense of place	The design of the ads has resonance with the content. Contemporary, sexy and wild.
<b>IMPACT</b>	social	Created a culture brand, without slogans and words.
	environmental	Used actual photographs of such of Master artworks were sold and proceeds were donated to charity.
<b>CORE TECH.</b>	reliable	NA.
	enabling	NA.
<b>QUALITY</b>	craftsmanship	Masterful design, high level and recognition.
	durability	The campaign has over 15 years, still with the consistent depiction of the bottle has become a phenomenon.
	concept	
<b>PROFIT IMPACT</b>		Absolut vodka is among the top selling spirit brands and is being sold in more than 20 countries. Today, 40% of worldwide revenues is made in Europe.
<b>BRAND IMPACT</b>		It is the No. 1 imported brand in the US.
<b>EXTENDABLE</b>		Resonant to alcohol.

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Explanation of ratings for Absolut Vodka

**Value Opportunity Analysis of INTEL**

		Low	Med	High
<b>EMOTION</b>	subversion	██████████	██████████	██████████
	independence	██████████	██████████	██████████
	security	██████████	██████████	██████████
	visually	██████████	██████████	██████████
	confidence	██████████	██████████	██████████
power	██████████	██████████	██████████	
<b>ERGONOMICS</b>	chips	██████████	██████████	██████████
	comfort	██████████	██████████	██████████
	safety	██████████	██████████	██████████
<b>ATTITUDE</b>	size of use	██████████	██████████	██████████
	perception	██████████	██████████	██████████
<b>AESTHETICS</b>	visual	██████████	██████████	██████████
	auditory	██████████	██████████	██████████
<b>IDENTITY</b>	point in time	██████████	██████████	██████████
	sense of place	██████████	██████████	██████████
<b>IMPACT</b>	social	██████████	██████████	██████████
	environmental	██████████	██████████	██████████
<b>CORE TECH</b>	reliable	██████████	██████████	██████████
	stable	██████████	██████████	██████████
<b>QUALITY</b>	customer ship	██████████	██████████	██████████
	durability	██████████	██████████	██████████
<b>PROFIT IMPACT</b>		██████████	██████████	██████████
<b>BRAND IMPACT</b>		██████████	██████████	██████████
<b>EXTENDABLE</b>		██████████	██████████	██████████

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Value Branding

VOA of Intel

**Value Opportunity Analysis of INTEL**

The Brand has been established through a brilliant marketing strategy, built on a program and the advertising campaign "Intel Inside".

Focus of product stability benefits Focus of product innovation line

<b>EMOTION</b>	subversion	Continuation of the quality of experience derived from innovation of chips with higher processing power.
	independence	Users want to operate without any dependence on external resources.
	security	Continuity and consistency of high performance.
	visually	The use of the Intel name gives users a sense of being part of a premium and high quality brand that brings predictability. Knowledge of product makes customer confident of purchase decision.
	confidence	Buying Intel chips makes consumers feel they are working with the world's leading chip manufacturer and gives a feeling of assurance and control.
<b>ERGONOMICS</b>	chips	No direct interaction with the chips, but overall product experience can be felt through high processing speed by computer users.
	comfort	High quality performance makes it an enjoyable experience.
	safety	The chip is embedded in the computer. The product is hard to fix.
<b>ATTITUDE</b>	size of use	Environmental factors in communication strategy.
	perception	Using Intel name through the "Intel Inside" campaign created a global image. Subsequent the usage of complex technology.
	auditory	Through the "Intel Inside" ad featuring the Blue Box group gave better attention. The name in the audio track and continues to be recalled.
<b>AESTHETICS</b>	visual	The ad gives focus on an available product, are visually appealing.
	auditory	The speaker came at the end of the "Intel Inside" TV ad has high recall.
	touch	NA
	taste	NA
<b>IDENTITY</b>	point in time	The presence of increasing microprocessors and chips with higher processing power in computing world today.
	sense of place	The high performance of the chip gives users an working with the computers and increasing user's performance.
	personality	Coming chips, modern and fast.
<b>IMPACT</b>	social	Intel back to the Future Program also to raise 400,000 teacher in 20 countries in technology by the end of 2003, in collaboration with Microsoft.
	environmental	Intel is actively developing technologies and products that conserve energy and also saving PC users around the world.
<b>CORE TECH</b>	reliable	Consistent quality and high performance of the chips.
	stable	Usage of technology with a low price, reduce online global among people.
<b>QUALITY</b>	customer ship	Maintain the integrity of Intel reputation as the leading chip manufacturer.
	durability	Maintain high performance throughout the life of the product.
<b>PROFIT IMPACT</b>		Keep consistent on new technologies that boost performance of its chips and make the process more profitable and efficient.
<b>BRAND IMPACT</b>		Ranking 1st among top 100 global brands. The brand has earned an identity and personality that is irreplaceable product. Capable of extending chip technology across different product categories.

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Value Branding

Explanation of ratings for Intel

**Value Opportunity Analysis of STARBUCKS**

		Low	Med	High
<b>EMOTION</b>	adventure			
	independence			
	excitement			
	confidence			
	power			
<b>ERGONOMICS</b>	in-store			
	consistent safety ease of use			
<b>ATTITUDE</b>	in-store			
	perception cognitive interest			
<b>AESTHETICS</b>	visual			
	usability			
	tactile			
	olfactory			
<b>IDENTITY</b>	in-store			
	polite in-store sense of place personality			
<b>IMPACT</b>	in-store			
	social environmental			
<b>CORE TECH.</b>	in-store			
	reliable maintainability			
<b>QUALITY</b>	in-store			
	craftsmanship durability			
<b>PROFIT IMPACT</b>				
<b>BRAND IMPACT</b>				
<b>EXTENDABLE</b>				

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VOA of Starbucks

**Value Opportunity Analysis of STARBUCKS**

The brand has been established through interaction with the store and its customers. The people who work there are an integral contributor to Starbucks' core mission of serving to create local experiences.

Extent of store visitability: Moderate-High. Extent of store interaction: High.

<b>EMOTION</b>	whimsy	An array of products, including pretty packaging and collectible items, create an anticipation for future moments.
	independence	Customers can freely move in the store, interact with each other and the space. The familiar movement of the menu across the Starbucks chain is comforting and comforting.
	excitement	Feeling of warmth, sense of coffee and just being in a warm, friendly environment. Premium brand and overall quality create an excitement of the product. Purchasing the first coffee gives a feeling of discovery.
<b>ERGONOMICS</b>	in-store	Familiar interaction with the products, space, other customers and the atmosphere encourages an ongoing.
	ease of use	It is a space to relax, read and work in a well-lit, clean and comfortable. Located in areas where people live and work. It provides quick service and a clear menu.
<b>ATTITUDE</b>	in-store	The store and its people are the face for Starbucks. Communications create goals, tips and friendly advice.
	perception	Product quality connects with people's values and stimulates brand loyalty.
<b>AESTHETICS</b>	visual	Use of warm, inviting lighting, the Starbucks logo, and the warm, brand-inspired design to make it feel comforting and easy to identify with its own design.
	usability	The store design is unique and unique. The sounds are warm, playful and create an overall good atmosphere.
	olfactory	Ambient music and special coffee aromas of Starbucks CEs have become signature scents which permeate their guests' experience as Starbucks coffee shops.
<b>IDENTITY</b>	in-store	The craftsmanship of coffee creates consistency. Reinforcing sense of local presence and overall Starbucks culture.
	perception	Creates a sense and working atmosphere of calm and think coffee. The store design reinforces the historic and contemporary atmosphere of Starbucks. Creates a space for it to visit.
<b>IMPACT</b>	in-store	The Starbucks franchise is built on a strong program. It does not support generic, high-end coffee or tea.
	social	The Starbucks franchise is built on a strong program. It does not support generic, high-end coffee or tea.
<b>CORE TECH.</b>	in-store	The consistent need to make the coffee are standardized across all Starbucks stores and provide coffee that is consistent and hot.
	usability	Fulfills value proposition of providing great coffee in the world, and meet customer expectations.
<b>QUALITY</b>	in-store	The service design of the Starbucks store is highly authentic, reflects brand personality and sets it apart from other coffee shops.
	usability	Starbucks is thought of as a lifestyle brand and has become successful through word of mouth and an advertising, it is most and unique.
<b>PROFIT IMPACT</b>		Has 3,700 outlets in 28 foreign markets. The largest coffee company in the world.
<b>BRAND IMPACT</b>		Has 37 percent coffee brand in the U.S. Ranked #88 among top 100 global brands.
<b>EXTENDABLE</b>		Starbucks offers high-quality coffee to its customers. It is capable of generating a variety of brand extensions.

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Starbucks Corporation

Explanation of ratings for Starbucks

### 3.2 Case Study

Case analysis will discuss the role of design in establishing three highly successful and powerful brands—Absolut Vodka, Starbucks, and Intel. Design adds value to a brand by contributing to the five asset categories of: brand awareness, brand personality, brand loyalty, perceived quality/value, brand associations. In turn, these asset categories empower a brand to command a premium price in the market, establish market share, leadership and distribution coverage. The preceding are measures to determine brand equity. [5] The case studies will bring forth design's contribution to the major asset categories and how this has helped establish high brand equity for the three brands.

#### Case Study: Absolut Vodka

Absolut faced big challenges during launch in the U.S market in 1979. It had an insignificant brand name, association with a country that has no vodka-producing tradition, an old-fashioned bottle, and market research warned against introduction. Today, Absolut commands 70 percent market share. [6] Design was a major factor in this success. Design contributed to the five asset categories of brand equity in the following ways:

**1.Brand Awareness.** Two characteristics unique to the product were used as a basis to create brand awareness: the name and the crystal-clear bottle without the paper label. Absolut's uniqueness was evident in its name, by the style and design of the bottle. For more information about the product one could read the fine print engraved on the front of the bottle.

**2.Brand Personality.** Absolut's identity is perceived as cutting edge, cool, yet playful and irreverent. In stores and on bar shelves the minimalist clear bottle, with its short, wide neck and the words Absolut Vodka spelled out on the glass in evenly sized capital letters, stands out. It was Michel Roux, director of marketing for Absolut at the time of its launch who redesigned the bottle, giving it a short neck, contemporary look, and a silver blue label, and had the label printed directly on the glass. The brand personality attracts consumers and creates loyalty.

**3. Brand Loyalty.** The consistent look of Absolut ads has made it recognizable amongst its consumers. The success of Absolut's advertising is curious. Vodka is aquavit, and aquavit is the most unsophisticated of alcohols. No taste no smell. There are no vodka connoisseurs, no vodka sampling parties. In other words, the taste is not in the product. When consumers see the bottle, they associate it with past experiences. The taste evidently is in the packaging and the semiotics that surround it. [7]

**4. Perceived Quality and Value.** The use of powerful design elements like shape and color has helped the brand build a distinct identity. Absolut has been able to command a price premium by delivering on value proposition. This has created a high sense of perceived value for the brand.

**5. Brand Associations.** Absolut's imaginative ads have influenced artists and designers like Andy Warhol. The Absolut campaign revolutionized liquor marketing through its aesthetic strategy. On one occasion, limited-edition lithographs of Absolut artwork were sold and proceeds given to local AIDS victims.

### **Case Study: Intel**

From the beginning, Intel's strategy was to push highly effective product design and introduce the newest devices in the market. In 1970, a Japanese firm Busicom contracted with Intel to make a set of chips for an electronic calculator. Intel scientist Ted Hoff responded with an innovative design that represented the first semiconductor 'central processing unit, or CPU. It was a few years before Intel executives recognized the true potential of the microprocessor as the "brains" for a microcomputer. [8]

Today, Intel has become the best-known brand in the high-tech Industry. It is a definitive model for successful "ingredient" branding. [9] The Intel Inside program has changed the way advertising is perceived in high-tech companies. Design contributed to the five asset categories to build brand equity in the following ways:

**1. Brand Awareness.** By branding microprocessor and creating a strong position for itself, Intel built brand awareness of an otherwise little known product. It has succeeded in clearing doubts and fears consumers have of complex products. The Intel Inside logo, appears on all the PCs and laptops, reinforces the fact that regardless of the brand of the computer, it is powered by an Intel Pentium chip. The brand name Pentium was the result of synergy between design firm Lexicon and Intel's marketing department. [10]

**2. Brand Personality.** Consumers who bought PCs with Intel chips are those who stay with products on the cutting edge of technology. They are considered modern, high-tech and 'in the know of things.' The message in the ads was designed to give face to an invisible product and create a distinct brand personality. The blue man group's unique commercials for Intel's Pentium processor created a fun and playful image. It was an unconventional way to communicate a message about a complex technological product.

**3. Brand Loyalty.** By talking to end-users (user-centered approach), via ads, Intel built brand loyalty. Consumers want a brand that brings predictability. Also, the processor is one of the most important parts of any computer, and today's consumer wants information and guidance in choosing that processor. Intel successfully created customer loyalty.

**4. Perceived Quality and Value.** The Intel brand is successful today as the Pentium chip is marketed to the end user and not just the OEMs (original equipment manufacturers). Product attributes like performance, technological superiority, and reliability were communicated to the user. Intel's association with computer chips became synonymous.

**5. Brand Associations.** By 1991, Dennis Carter, vice president and director of sales and marketing Intel, had developed a model for Intel Inside. DSW designed the logo and in April 1991, IBM Corp., became the first "personal computer" to carry the Intel Inside logo. [11] Other big players in the market like Dell and Compaq also followed suit. The "Intel Inside" logo appears on all PCs and laptops made by them. This led to consumers demanding for PCs powered by Intel chips.

### **Case Study: Starbucks**

Starbucks opened its first location in Seattle's Pike Place Market. The coffee company was founded in 1971. On his trip to Italy, in Milan, Howard Shultz saw the prevalence of espresso bars and was impressed with its popularity. It made him realize the potential of developing a similar coffee-bar culture in Seattle. He introduced to the world the coffee bar culture of Milan. Today, Starbucks, named after the first mate in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, is the world's leading retailer, roaster, and brand of specialty coffee with coffeehouses worldwide. More than 11 million customers visit a Starbucks coffeehouse each week. [12] Design contributed to the five asset categories to build brand equity in the following ways:



**1. Brand Awareness.** The Starbucks brand embodies the spirit of the company and is a lifestyle brand. The Starbucks logo— the Mermaid— creates immediate recall and recognition. The store design, logo and trendy settings appeal to professionals, youth, and families. The phenomenal brand awareness is a result of word of mouth and not advertising. Starbucks spends not more than \$20 million in advertising. The user experience is particularly emphasized upon.

**2. Brand Personality.** The Starbucks brand is perceived as outgoing, hip, friendly and warm. The space is designed to make one feel comfortable and relaxed. This greatly enhances the user experience.

**3. Brand Loyalty.** Why do people pay 3 dollars for a Starbucks coffee? Because, Starbucks provides an experience and, not just coffee. It's the design of the customer experience and interaction with the brand that people pay for. The quality and quick service, a place to unwind and enjoy the atmosphere makes it attractive to people. The people who work at Starbucks are the brand's ambassadors and ensure customers get excellent service. This has led to strong brand loyalty.

**4. Perceived Quality/Value.** The hot, aromatic coffee and a variety of other confectionaries have added to the perceived value of Starbucks brand. Customers receive value for their money. Furthermore, all stores carrying the Starbucks name across the world deliver consistent quality and value. It also promotes cultural events and community activities.

**5. Brand Associations.** Starbucks is associated with environmentally friendly products and social contributions to the neighborhoods it exists in.

## 4. Conclusion

It can be inferred from the preceding discussions that brands function at multiple levels in a consumer's mind and in diverse market segments in the present day. The use of different media to disburse a brand's message further leads to varied interpretations by the receiver of the message. However, from the three case studies, it is evident that different approaches have been used to establish meaning and identity to the respective brands, which give them a distinct identity and personality.

The case studies include communication and information design (ads), graphic design, product design, user-centered design, and identity design as important design elements that create a brand. The important thing to note is that the mix of these design principles will vary depending on the product and brand. Also, one has to understand the nature of the product and service to apply design principles. Hence, the mix of various types of design used will change depending on the brand image aspired for. The two methodologies discussed have been tested on all three brands and results prove that design adds value to the brands in the following ways:

- ?? Elements of design create a brand experience
- ?? Strengthens differentiation; sustains competitive advantage
- ?? Design helps in acquisition and retention of consumers

Companies today wish to build relationships with their customers and create a brand bond. The brand experience has become a critical factor in establishing brand strategy. Companies can achieve this by pursuing experiential branding, which means to approach a brand as a user experience. This would entail creating a relationship of trust and belief with the consumer. Belief drives behavior and by influencing behavior, brands create relationships. Experiential branding requires new tools and methods many of which are owned by design. User centered methods of the design process can assist in experiential branding and help build powerful brands.

A product needs to connect with qualities that people value. Good ads and brand campaigns are successful when they appeal to a customer's sense of value. A competitive price point alone will not motivate today's intelligent customer to purchase any product. Design can contribute to building a brand by conducting user research and testing of brand concept. The user-centered approach increases the acceptability and appeal of the brand; helps achieve the appropriate brand image.

Consolidation of test results led to the following conclusions: User-centered approach creates a brand bond between consumer and brand. Thus, incorporating the user-centered approach in brand development, would lead to long-term market dominance of the brand. Since the user-centered approach is compatible with how designers work, it will help design and marketing work effectively to create a brand. Design also aids in shared creation of brand equity between design and marketing. Initiating a dialogue between design and branding teams can further realize these benefits.

## **Application of Findings**

If the user-centered approach to brand development is adopted, it will lead to long-term market dominance. Also, a partnership of marketing and design in brand equity increases brand value. Lastly, further investigation of brand equity provides literature to establish the relationship between design and marketing for educational purposes.

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