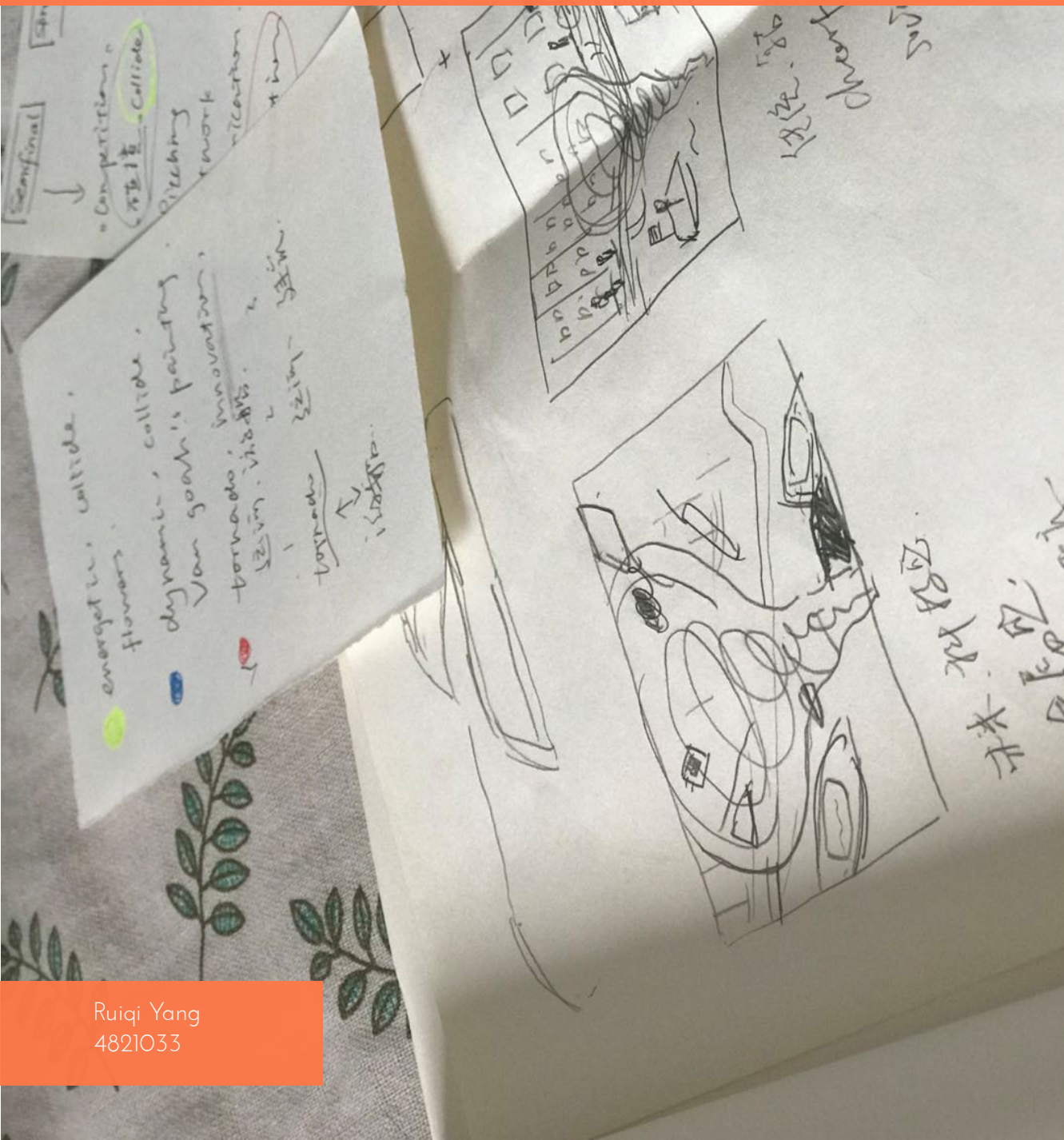


# Tool development & validation for brand manifestation design



# Acknowledgments

This thesis was completed under the guidance of my supervisors Erik Jan Hultink and Sijja Bakker-Wu. Regular meetings during the 5 months helped me keep on track and their instant feedbacks make it no different from face-to-face coaching. Firstly, I'd like to thank my chair Erik Jan Hultink, who always reminded me of keeping a rigorous academic attitude and think critically. With his help, I realized that details, such as to give terms clear definitions, matter. Secondly, I want to thank Sijja Bakker-Wu, who was always willing to share her knowledge and help me whenever I had troubles with literature or the process. And thanks to this graduation opportunity she posted, I got the chance to start with this interesting topic. No matter what I do in the future, I hope this project will not be the end of my academic thinking.

At the beginning of my project, the world was confronted with COVID-19. Besides huge damages it has done to human well-being and economy, the outbreak also changes the way of working and socializing. Collaboration activities like brainstorming and user test in my original plans had to cut off or change into online sessions but there're a group of people, like Jeroen van Erp, Petra Cubric, Chong Yin, Nermin Camo, Yujing Yang...(I don't have space to thank all of them here) offered a helping hand and I'd like to thank all participants who helped me with the data collection or contributed valuable insights. Their supports are of great significance to my findings and their kind gestures and encouragements are one of the most precious gifts during the quarantine period.

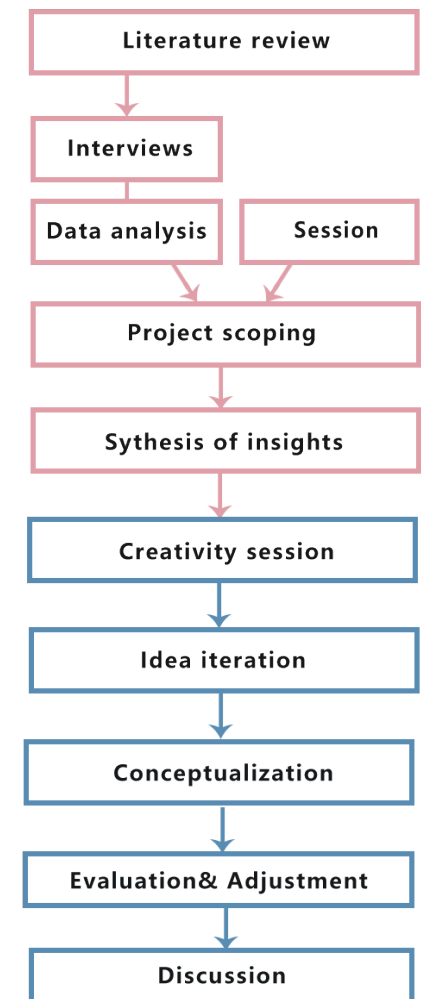
And look at the positive side, this unforeseen circumstance also reminded me of what I took for granted for a long time, like the companion of my beloved friends and families. Chenjing, Sijie and Chong, thanks for your constructive advice on both study and life. And Wenjing, thank you for offering me a nice place to live which ensured me to complete the last part of my project in the Netherlands. And all my foreign friends and those who live back in China, thank you for caring about my health and laughter you brought me.

Finally, my last words come for my dearest mom and dad. You were the ones who persuaded me to get what I really want in the first place so that I could spend fulfilling two years in TU Delft. And thank you for keeping sending me funny videos to chase my blues away these months and taking care of my dog when I'm abroad. I will hop on a plane one week later and see you probably 2 weeks after quarantine, although you can't understand the English letters I wrote here, I'll give you a thousand hugs and kisses to show how much I miss and love you.

# Executive summary

Nowadays, social media plays an increasingly important role in people's daily lives. Many brands make use of it and send out different information, for instance, sales, event notifications and sometimes even their position on social issues through platforms like Facebook and Instagram. However, the process of developing these manifestations have many small problems and interaction among stakeholders are not quite efficient. For example, brand designers often come up against difficulties, like lacking references and "endless" adjustment with brand managers. For brand managers, they wish designers to explain the story/strategy behind manifestations and there are no clear criteria to evaluate if a brand manifestation is qualified.

This master thesis explores the possibilities for improving the current process of brand manifestations design in the context of digital platform marketing, specifically for brand designers and managers in the internal branding department, and introduces a series of methods and recommendations for both brand managers and designers. Process of this graduation project is illustrated in the picture on the right. A literature review was conducted at the beginning of the project and from there I decided to focus on brand manifestation design for digital platform marketing. Then I choose the simplified grounded theory method, supplemented by session, as my research methods to explore the context and decide design direction. After research, with common problems and root causes being identified and three ingredients of a good manifestation being decided (balance between "brand fit" & "innovative", rationales behind visuals, and conveying right messages), I started the ideation phase to develop a series of methods which enable to enhance the experience of brand manifestation design in internal branding department. After idea iteration, conceptualization and two round of validation, three final concepts were developed and a new workflow was created. Future recommendation, as well as discussion, were proposed in the last chapter.



Process summary

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## Reading guidelines

This report consists of 6 chapters. **CHAPTER 1** provides an introduction to the project, explains my aims, schedule and so on.

In **CHAPTER 2**, a literature review was done to define terminologies, explore the background as well as existing research of brand manifestation design to find knowledge gaps. It ends by classifying literature which helps me with the ideation or backs up final solutions, such as those related to collecting inspirations and how visuals and texts affect creativity.

**CHAPTER 3** demonstrates different methods that I used in various phases. And how I scoped step by step and settle down design guidelines by organizing methods in this way. What's more, insights which need further analysis, such as theoretical codes, also displayed here as part of the process at the end of this chapter.

**CHAPTER 4** shows the process of problem scoping and outlines the main results of my research. A more detailed journey map of designers in the internal department is made. All those insights contribute to my final solutions.

**CHAPTER 5** includes three concepts that I developed for brand managers and designers in internal branding department to improve their manifestation design experience. What I've done with validation and adjustment are included in "idea iteration" part and shows the gradual development of concepts.

**CHAPTER 6** discusses the contributions as well as limitations of my work and reflects on my personal goals and research goals. In the end, a few recommendations, which are related to brand manifestation design in social media marketing context, are given as a wrap-up.

# CHAPTER 1 | INTRODUCTION

## In this chapter

- 1.1 Project introduction
- 1.2 Target group
- 1.3 Personal ambitions
- 1.4 Timeable

## Project introduction

I got the graduation opportunity to develop and validate a tool to help designers/brand managers with manifestation design.

From my personal experience with brand manifestation design, it's hard to tell if the manifestation is attractive to target consumers. And even if it became a success, creators may still be uncertain about whether messages that consumers receive are in line with the plan or which part of the manifestation is evoking which kind of emotion. But what are the difficulties which people who dealing with manifestations all day are facing? I conducted 6 in-depth interviews and one creativity session. And get many interesting results. Then I organized them into several categories in order to see the big picture.

After I have the journey map, common problems and the causes, components of a nice manifestation... Another session was held as a starting point of

ideation.. From that, I developed 3 concepts and discussed with brand designers to make it better and more complete.

In the end, I plan to test those concepts in an actual case and make adjustments according to the validation feedbacks.

## Target group

Although I interviewed designers and brand managers in agencies, the targets of the tools that I developed are designers and brand managers in the internal branding department. That's mainly because my concepts will be tested in-depth with a designer from the internal department but I failed to find participants from agencies.

However, considering the similarity of their actual design process (communication process differs a lot though), there should be something helpful for designers in agencies too.



Designers and brand managers in internal branding department.

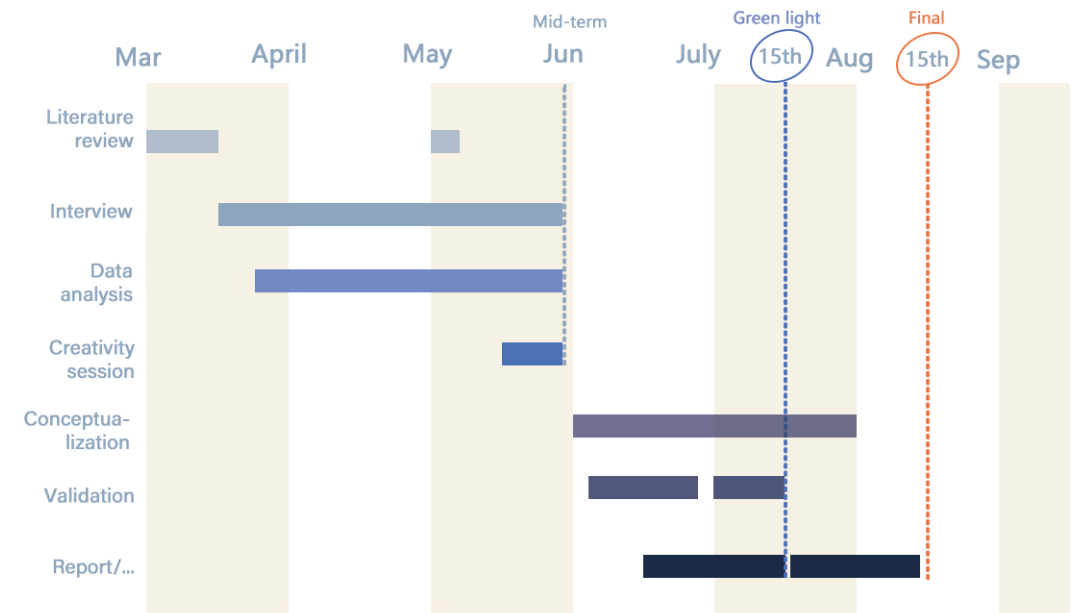
## Personal ambitions

I've had a great interest in branding since bachelor and wish to dive deeper in my graduation project. Branding is not a normal section of design courses, at least not in my bachelor, so to learn more I took an elective course in business faculty, called Corporate Culture. It focussed on the marketing and I had trouble finding where design skills/mindsets can be employed. Thanks to BPC course, I have a systematic view of brands by reading Brand Management- Co-creating meaningful brands and learnt how could design contribute to branding. Since then my interests have been growing and I have an ambition to work in this field with my design capabilities and see how far I can go.

In this project, by interviewing and holding sessions with experienced brand designers and brand managers, I've gradually understood their way of working and think critically about each detail—Is that right? Can it be improved? What caused this habit?...The attempt of summarizing general rules and assessing the current ways of working is a precious experience.

Although there's not many related literature about this topic, I still gained a lot during the reading and exploration process and it's also quite new for me to validate some of the theory in reality and reflect from that.

## Timetable



# CHAPTER 2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

## In this chapter

- 2.1 Definition of “brand manifestation”
- 2.2 Context of brand manifestation design
- 2.3 Visuals and texts

## Definition of “brand manifestation”

### IN THE MARKETING CONTEXT

The meaning of Brand manifestation is not clear in marketing world. Literally, brand manifestation is overall defined as what brand could manifest. But there are two different points of view in the marketing context. Some people believe brand manifestations stand for values that are unable to measure. The brand manifestation is described as a group of intangible elements of brand which is perceived as an integration of customer-centric attributes, for instance the popularity of the brand, as shown in *Figure 1.1*, as well as market-oriented attributes including the ability to maintain price point and competitive advantages of the brand(Rajagopal, 2013).



Figure 1.1 Popularity manifested by the brand "Apple"

In other literature, brand manifestations can be anything related to the brand. Not only something tangible like organizations, activities, people(Mühlbacher, 2008) tangible brand image and brand expression but also intangible brand loyalty and brand experience, are collectively called brand manifestation(Verma, 2019).

### IN THE DESIGN CONTEXT

Differ from what brand manifestation means in marketing, brand manifestations in the design context are tangible and usually made by designers or team. In addition, the concept of brand experience is way broader than brand manifestation. Well-designed manifestations will help with other touchpoints design to create a better brand experience.

However, in Brand and Product Commercialisation course in TU Delft, a manifestation is described as a transition from brand identity to launching strategy, like a visual brand identity. Based on personal experiences, it's not only tangible expression of the brand identity but also show what the product/service.

In this project, I would like to use the words “brand manifestation” to refer to visual expressions derived from the leading principle. It could be like a propaganda Poster, shown as *Figure 2*, or a visual identity system in brandbook(*Figure 3*), which communicates brand identity in a visual way and instruct another designs, such as the website, uniforms and retail stores, it can also be the advertising materials for marketing, like social media posts

or a campaign poster, shown in *Figure 1.4*.

There are many different forms of brand manifestation and I will develop tool for the phase of designing digital marketing materials considering that most designers in my research and participants in validation phase are working in this field. In view of the general design process are similar for all graphic brand manifestations so it should also provide help for them more or less.



Figure 1.2 Manifestations to show the product/service and brand identity

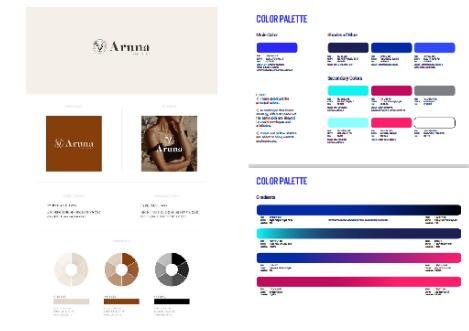


Figure 1.3 Visual identity in Brandbook



Figure 1.4 Digital campaign posters

# Broad input Brand experience design

2.2 |

## Context of brand manifestation design

### BIG PICTURE: BRAND EXPERIENCE DESIGN

After defining the "brand manifestation", let's step backwards to see a bigger picture. The brand manifestation is derived from verbal brand values and extend into different touchpoints and the process is part of the brand experience design

To design brand experience, there is a three-stage approach(Calabretta et al, 2017), which starts from collecting and analysing broad information(convergent stage) to generating a "Leading Principle"(transition stage) and then various TouchPoints are designed according to the Leading Principle(divergent stage). For my graduation project, I will focus on the part from the Transition stage to Divergent stage, shown as Figure 6, which is also referred as brand communication by Michael Beverland(Beverland, 2018). Since there are not a lot of literature related to brand manifestation design, I also look at literature which covers these stages to gain an overview and back up my project.

Leading principle(s)

Various touchpoints

Product

Brand Manifestation

Buildings

service

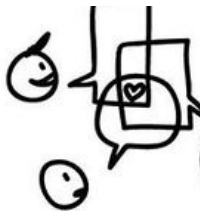
## CONTEXT

Design can be used to reflect corporate and brand values(Kotler et al, 1984) and to define the distinguishing attributes of brands in the company's brand portfolio(Olson et al, 1998). Among various touchpoints design, most of the literature talks about the products or service design, even if paper mentions that the method can be also conducted for other contexts as well such as advertising content(Boatwright, et al, 2009), writers don't elaborate on it or further examples. However, although communication mediums design, such as flyers and advertisements, also take an essential part in touchpoints design, there are not many tools outside for designers/brand managers to use in the literature.

However, I did get some useful insights from literature which develop tangible products or service according to

brand strategy. Firstly, some parts of brand identity enable to be easily shown, such as "affordable", while it can be struggled when it comes to the emotion part. The brand's emotional attributes are manifested by the metaphor of personality(Rajagopal,2013).

Secondly, as advances in technology have enabled new sources to aggregated into large datasets, multimedia plus the Internet of Things allow things like consumers' preferences, behaviours, and emotions being tracked and reviewed in real-time(Beverland, 2018). So it's necessary to look at new media, like Instagram, and see how new media and technology could help improve the design.



## THE CHALLENGE OF COMMUNICATING FEELINGS

At the phase of designing various touchpoints, designers/brand managers often face the challenge of communicating their feelings, "Sometimes I actually had a feeling about something is wrong or right, I just can't express myself well enough. ... I still find it quite difficult to put it in words." said by one of the interviewees(Calabretta et al, 2017).

And this challenge is inevitable because meanings of a brand are usually determined on individual sensory experiences and introspective states, such as cognitive operations, beliefs, and emotions (Barsalou, 1999). In this case, as creators, designers/brand managers have to include those intangible factors in the creative process.

2.3 |

## Visual and texts



### DESIGN VISUALS OUT OF VERBAL BRAND IDENTITY

The actionable mission, or to put it in another way, leading value(Calabretta et al, 2017), can be understood within the company and can be converted to messages for outsiders like advertising agencies, suppliers, and consumers(Boatwright et al, 2009). The output of crafting is an identity in words, no matter using Value Opportunity Analysis tool(Boatwright et al, 2009)or a set of methods introduced in the book Contrarian Branding: Stand Out

by *Camouflaging the Competition*(Van der Vorst, 2017).

However, the process of translating verbal identities into visuals seem to be a creative activity that lacks definition and guidance. Personally, it is a struggled process when our group tried to design the manifestation out of the text-only brand identity since we were afraid of missing the good values made from the last step.

# CHAPTER 3 | RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter shows two different research methods that were used in the project. First, I decide research questions and then Qualitative research method was conducted first to scope down design direction. After analysis of four interviews, the design direction was settled. Then a creativity session and the following 2 interviews dive deep into this direction and build up the base for the further tool development.

This chapter only explain the method I chose and the process. Scoping and results are in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, respectively.

## In this chapter

- 3.1 Research questions
- 3.2 Qualitative research
- 3.3 Co-creation method
- 3.4 Validation method

3.1 |

## Research questions

Few literature explains how brand manifestations are designed so it's necessary to explore the context of brand manifestation design, from process, stakeholders, tools, problems, improvement opportunities and so on. I used a quite broad research question, How to improve designers' experience in designing brand manifestations, to start. The research part of the project is meant to explore the context of brand manifestation design as deep as possible before I decide which stages need improvement. And I deconstructed the research question into 5 subquestions.

### Sub questions:

1. What is the **current process** of brand manifestation?
2. What **difficulties or problems** happen in the process?
3. What **tools/methods** they are using to design manifestations?
4. How do designers **translate intangibles**?
5. How do designers **collaborate with other stakeholders**?

3.2 |

## Qualitative research method

Quantitative research seeks to identify the relationships between variables and often aims to reduce the diversity of responses to an average response. While qualitative research explores difference and divergence within contents (Braun, 2013). As mentioned before, qualitative research appears to be more suitable here. Besides, according to Braun, is normally used for theory-testing while qualitative research tends to be applied for theory generating. In this project, there is no theory to test but only the need to gather rich data for this specific context, which is currently lack of literature. Because of these, there was chosen to obtain knowledge through qualitative research.

### SIMPLIFIED GROUNDED THEORY METHOD

Then the Grounded theory method was picked. As an exploratory method, the grounded theory is particularly well suited for investigating processes that have attracted little prior research attention (Milliken, 2010) and helps to understand the current design process and difficulties faced by designers and brand managers. However, as Strauss and Corbin advised, at least 10 interviews with detailed coding are necessary for building a grounded theory (Saldaña, 2012) so, it's only a simplified version of grounded theory experience in this project considering that only six (for now, four) interviews were conducted. Another inevitable drawback of this method is that the huge data generated by it is neither easy to manage nor for others to review.

in agencies because they get in touch with many different brands and should be more experienced in translating brand identity. However, samples in qualitative research are not wholly prespecified (Miles et al, 2013). On the one hand, I couldn't reach more participants working in agencies and on the other hand, after first two interviews with designers in internal branding department (the one with Chong) and advertisement agency (the one with Miss Wu), I realized the process are quite different, considering that my validation tests will be done with designer in internal branding department in Blue Tulip Award I decided the next two designers should be in the internal branding team so more detailed questions can be asked, for example, "How do you search for inspirations?", "What kind of elements do you extract from given materials" and so on.

### SAMPLING STRATEGY

Looking at the sub research questions, *Figure 3.1* implies that information from designers are more relevant to research question. However, in order to make the journey more complete and see things in different perspectives, brand managers are also interviewed. In total there should be 6 interviews and four of them are done with designers (for now, two of them).

At the beginning, I planned to interview more designers

Data collection methods	Subquestions
Interview brand managers and designers	1. What is the current process of brand manifestation design?
Interview brand managers and designers	2. What difficulties or problems happen in the process?
Interview designers	3. What tools/methods they are using to design manifestations?
Interview designers	4. How do designers translate intangibles?
Interview designers	5. How do designers collaborate with other stakeholders?

Figure 3.1

## INTERVIEW GUIDE

Two different interview guides were made but they are adjusted before each interviews. Some questions were changed according to participants' specialty, for example, I asked Petra(digital marketing manager) about branding through social media and requirements of a nice digital marketing material. And some questions were added to fill knowledge gaps shows in data analysis phase. And some were changed because of the results in data analysis.

**Mind map** is my starting point of creating interview guides, shown in *Figure 3.2*. It was made according to sub research questions. Based on that I divided the interview into 5 sections for **designers**:

- Section 1. Process of brand manifestation design;
- Section 2. Communicate intangible factors;
- Section 3. Tool & methods;
- Section 4. Evaluation & feedback;
- Section 5. Others.

And also 5 sections for **brand manager**:

- Section 1. Validate the process
- Section 2. Collaboration with designers;
- Section 3.Tools & methods;
- Section 4. Test & feedback;
- Section 5. Others.

In general, questions for designers are more detailed but mainly focus on design phase while questions for brand managers are built not only for gaining a deeper understanding of the journey, but also for validating insights from designer.

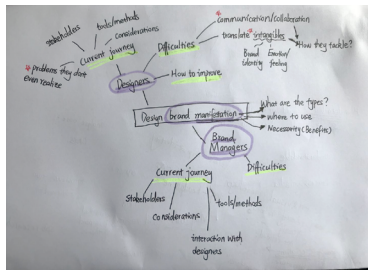


Figure 3.2 Mind map

## INTERVIEW

Through one-on-one interviews(approximately 30-50 minutes each), rich information were gathered. The form of the interview is semi-structured.

During interviews I also asked for many examples but most of them are based on participants' personal experiences. Considering the limited number of interviews, these data may not representative enough and need more interviews to test or support.

The process and summary of each interview is in the next page.

## DATA ANALYSIS

After gaining data it is required to analyse them to gain conclusions and insights. In this part it will become clear how the data was analysed and what choices were made in this process. All interviews were transcribed and coded line-by-line and each interview provided valuable insights.

First, I made a detailed **line-by-line initial coding**, then categorised the related codes. After categorizing, interesting aspects appeared and some of them were beyond the original interview guides, for example, after interviewing **Miss. Wu(2nd interview)** in advertising agency, " But there are usually a lead agency being responsible for the big case like that(design visual identity). They will fix all the key visuals and distribute them to small companies below to eat the cake piece by piece." quoted from her, I started wondering what tool do lead agency use when they build up visual identity. So question is added in interview guide for creativity director of Fabrique. In this way, I gradually understand the how brand manifestations are developed in reality.

However, there are no standard rules to follow for the identification of categories (Olesen, 2010), it depends a lot on the ability and experience of researchers. I've worked on it individually so the bias is inevitable but I've tried my best to reduce that, for instance, In Vivo Codes were used in initial coding so that words in labels are mostly from participants themselves and it helped to diminish self interpretation when I categorized those codes, shown in *Figure 3.3*. And I also use a completely different method, **creativity session**, to re-explore the phase and validate some important findings with another group of 5 designers.

TRANSCRIPT	In Vivo Codes
[I-RY] How do you translate verbal brand values into visual expressions? Could you describe the general procedure? You can also use the picture you just drew.	1. Verbal brief usually
[I-CY] Uh, I think is the step 2. If you look at the map, the first step is getting the brief which is usually verbal and tell me points that my manager wants. Then I search those keywords in the Pinterest or google or Behind or somewhere. So I will just roll down the results, pictures, and get a feeling. And then, if I find one or two previous design which are really good and fit with requirements, I'll present them as references.	2. Brief: what manager wants
	3. Keywords in brief: search inspiration
	4. Get a feeling: roll down results
	5. References: fit previous design

Figure 3.3 Examples of initial coding

Figure 3.4 shows an example of how focused coding was conducted. Thereafter, these were used to code the other two interviews. Some categories are fully developed in this process, such as "journey map for brand manifestation design in Blue Tulip Award" and "Different goals in internal branding department & design/advertising agencies", at the meantime new categories and subcategories appeared, like "Repair the brand".

Category: Precondition of good teamwork	
just communicate in time	Good hierarchical teamwork: just communicate in time
I'd rather work on my own with enough time budget. Otherwise, it can work if teamwork is well-organized.	Well-organized teamwork: clear division of work
[I-RY] How can you ensure the good communication in these situations?	Good communication(flat organization): people are familiar with each other
[I-W] If it is a studio, I think people must have been quite familiar with each other.	

Figure 3.3 Examples of focused coding

**1**

**Interviewee 1**  
(Chong Yin)

Brand designers in Blue Tulip Award(a new contest) of Accenture

Manifestations he design: Digital marketing materials(like social media posts), event banner, posters...

From this interview, I gained rich data about process of manifestation design in internal branding department, he also described his ways of collecting inspirations(in different situations) in detail.

His problem is mainly about collecting inspiration. Making drafts cost the most of the time. He gave some requirements of the "future tool". He never did user test and feels more feedback can be gathered if he uses visual to communicate...

**2**

**Interviewee 2**  
(Miss Wu)

Brand designers in a 4A advertising agency in Shnghai

Manifestations she design(ed): Digital marketing materials(like social media posts and campaign materials), posters...

This interviewee has worked in several 4A agencies so she's quite familiar with the brand manifestation design process in agency. She gave me a few examples of how she conveyed atmosphere/feeling in the manifestations, complexity of communicating. She believes working experience is the answer to many problems.

Different from designers in internal branding department, she needs to spend more effort to understand the brand. But except from verbal requests, she also gets key visual for reference. She mentioned communication is really important and also cost the most of the time because there are many stakeholders in the process. She mentioned that visuals are necessary in communication and even the brief she got is usually contains visuals.

**3**

**Interviewee 3**  
(Petra Čubrić)

Brand manager in Blue Tulip Award(a new contest) of Accenture

Her job: Digital marketing materials(like social media posts), event banner, posters...

Through this interview, I verified and enriched the process. And since she is the manager of interviewee 1, it's interesting to make some comparisons, like different motivations, focus and so on.

She stressed the importance of communication twice and also mentioned problems when get along with the designer. She doesn't have design background, so it's kind of like see things in a different angel. What's more, she also introduced some characteristic of social media branding which I will consider in my future design.

**4**

**Interviewee 4**  
(Jeroen van Erp)

One of the founders of Fabrique, Innovation strategist

His job: Fix brand identity, collaboration ...

He showed me the tool that Fabrique use for designing brand visual identity and shared two examples of dynamic identity and visual identity and how it works. He also mentioned that for most companies, the first thing to do is to fix the brand.

He also argued that the emotion that has to be evoked is the most important thing, the emotion or experience because emotion is a part of the experience, at the end this is the most important goal and the manifestation is only the carrier. He also believe branding is a teamwork and designers won't work by himself. In addition, whether conducting user tests or not really depends on clients.

**5**

**Interviewee 5**  
(Yujing Yang)

Brand manager in Blue Tulip Award(a new contest) of Accenture

Manifestations she design: Dynamic identity(video), website design(sustainable) for Nolabel

She described how she extracted elements from the brand and made visuals/videos that fit the brand. She use quantitative method to test if the visual convey the right message.

What's more, she also mentioned how she collected inspirations and manage elements, such as typographic to show the brand identity. And she get the brand identity mainly through communicating with clients and field research.

**6**

**Interviewee 6**  
(Nermin Camo)

Brand manager in Blue Tulip Award(a new contest) of Accenture

Manifestations he design: Brandbook, digital campaign materials(campaign for websites, posters...)

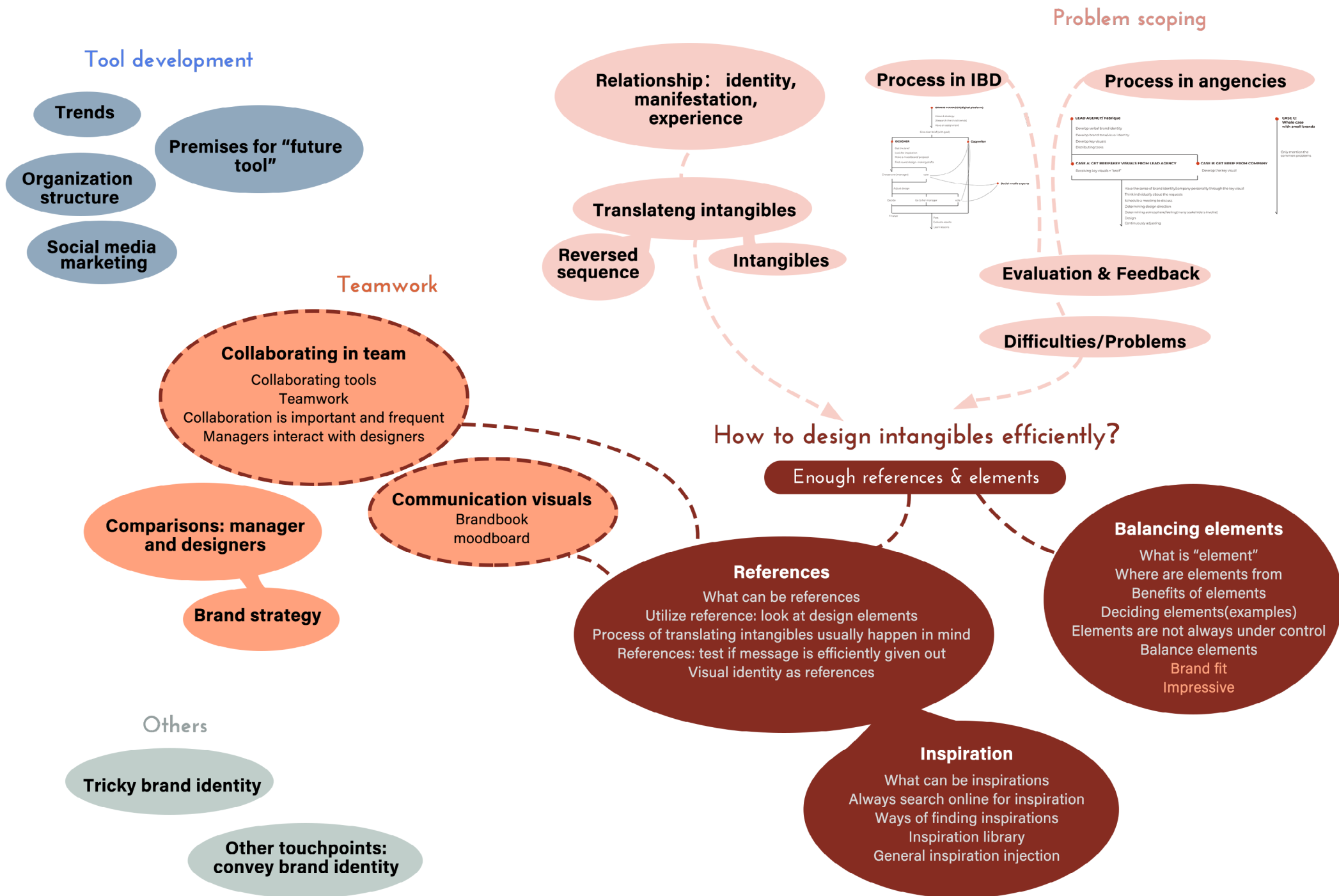
Through this interview, "brand fit" is the most important thing for him to design manifestation. However, he said there's uncertainty of choosing colours and things like that by giving an example of the changes in Secrid core colour.

He also talked about moodboards the team used and how to collect those inspirations and decide the design direction. Communication plays the most important role here. In the end, he shared with me his way of getting inspirations.

Category overview

Infographic in the right shows the overview of categories and a few subcategories. In the next chapter, the results of data analysis will be combined with results from a creativity session and demonstrated in detail.

Qualitative research method helps me gain an overall picture of the brand manifestation design. After four interviews, I narrowed down design direction to How to improve the experience of designing a nice brand manifestation(impressive and fit the brand) in regard to references. So the next 2 interviews and a creativity session were performed to gain more insights on this direction(wine red)



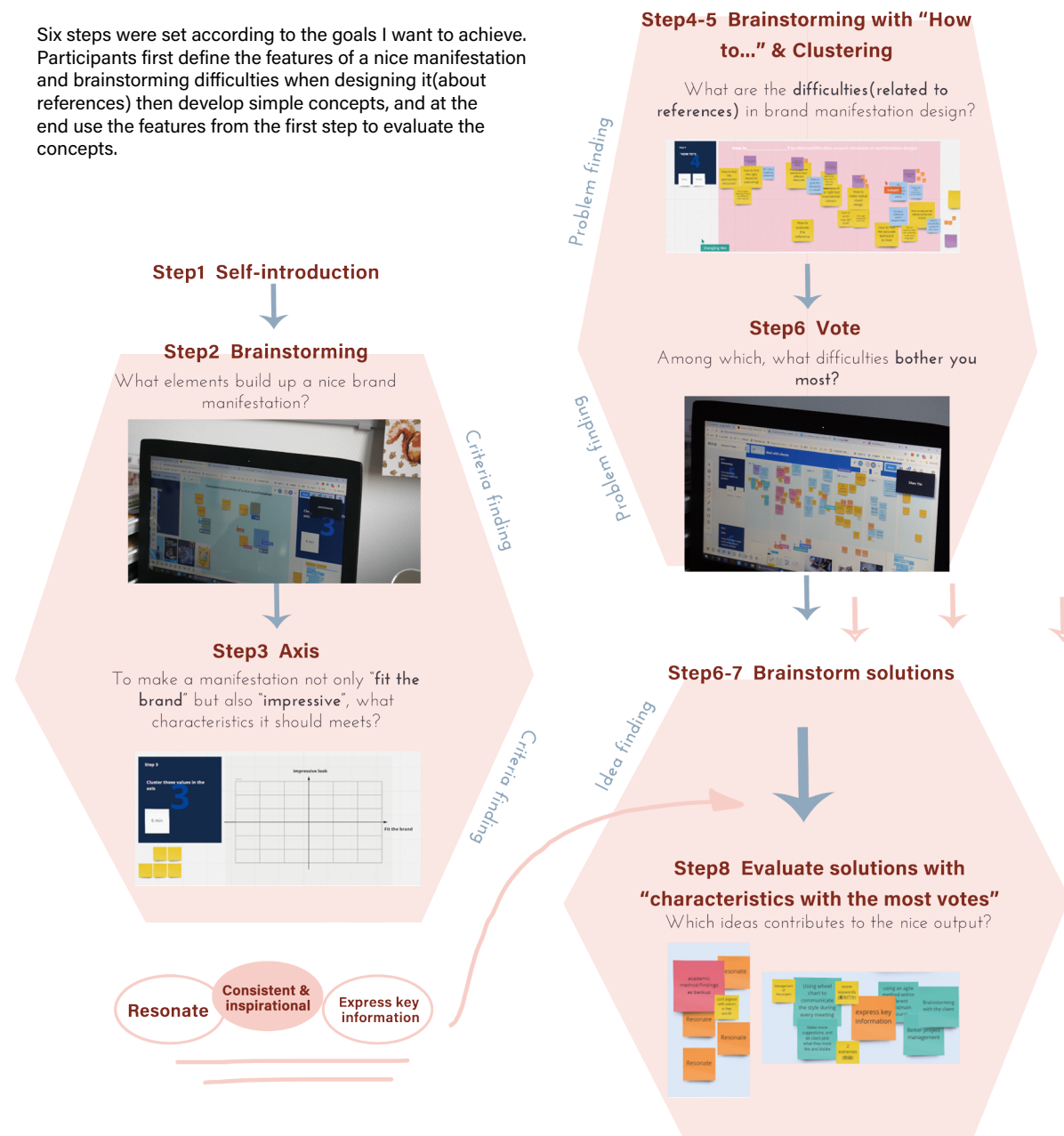
# Creativity sessions

## THE FIRST SESSION

After analyzing four interviews, design direction was decided. It is about How to improve the current experience of collecting and utilizing references in the first round design. To dive deep in this specific context, I invited 5 designers who had experienced brand manifestation design. And held an online creativity session through Miro and Zoom. The session lasts about 1h 30min.

\*Definition of "Reference" here: Thing(s) that help designers make manifestations. It can be materials given by clients or inspirations found by themselves. Designers usually extract, play around and manage the elements in reference during the design process.

Six steps were set according to the goals I want to achieve. Participants first define the features of a nice manifestation and brainstorming difficulties when designing it(about references) then develop simple concepts, and at the end use the features from the first step to evaluate the concepts.



## THE SECOND SESSION

The second session was facilitated at the beginning of the ideation phase to provide some inspirations.

### Step1 Introduction

First of all, I gave a short presentation to help them understand the topic I was working on.

### Step2 Flower association



Flower association method is the first investigation of the context by exploring one or two key elements in the problem statement (Heijne, et al, 2019).

### Step3 Vote for inspirational key words



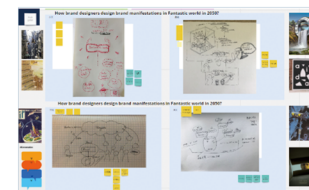
Participants voted for key words which are the most irrelevant, relevant to three criteria. And then chose two words from "relevant" and one from "irrelevant" as the starting point for ideation.

\*Ideation for solutions:

-Idea generation round 1: "How do brand designers design brand manifestations in Fantastic world in 2050?" (20 min.)

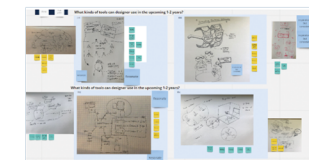
Idea generation round 2: "What kinds of tools can designer use in the upcoming 1-2 years?" (30 min.)

### Step4 Ideation round 1



Step6 Vote according to criteria

### Step5 Ideation round 2



### STEP 4 IDEATION ROUND ONE

To start the Creativity journey, the problem was restated as "How do brand designers design brand manifestations in Fantastic world (without any technology limitations) in 2050?" which allowed participants to get rid of assumptions and create all kinds of new perspectives for the issues they are working on (Marc, 2012). To help participants generate wild ideas, 8 pictures of the future world were provided. Since all participants were equipped with sketching skills, they were asked to draw their ideas on papers and then upload drawings to Miro. Compared to writing ideas on posters, it's less on quantity but more hitchhiking (Heijne, et al, 2019) which is also proven by my previous experiences that participants usually are easier to get inspired by drawing and create something beyond expectation.

### STEP 5 IDEATION ROUND TWO

Based on ideas from previous ideation round, the participants switched back to reality and came up with tools which designers can use to meet ideal experience. These ideas are built upon the basis of the ideal experiences from the last step but are more practical, to put it in another way, are able to be implemented within the next one to two years.

# CHAPTER 4 | RESULTS

## In this chapter

- 4.1 Problem scoping
- 4.2 How do brand designers utilize reference?
- 4.3 Detailed journey map & Existing problems
- 4.4 Three standards for brand manifestations
- 4.5 Requirement of the future tool/method

## 4.1 | Problem scoping

### DESIGNERS IN INTERNAL BRANDING DEPARTMENT

There are many differences between agencies and internal branding department (IBD) in companies. In advertising agencies, cases are divided into small tasks and more stakeholders are involved, for example, they have accounts as a communication bridge between designers and clients and planners to make plans for time schedules as well as budget. Designers in internal branding department are chosen as my design target and I plan to validate my final output with a brand designer who works for the Blue Tulip Award of Accenture. Although designers in agencies are not my focus, it's nice to interview them since they have experienced various brands, tried more tools/methods, like dilemma list introduced by Fabrique, and had more experiences about developing visuals in a systematic way. Apart from designers, I also interviewed two brand managers to review the process from a different perspective and to figure out how they collaborate.

The interesting thing is that, when comparing two journey maps that I made for brand manifestation design process in internal branding department (Figure 4.1) and agencies (Figure 4.2), according to the analysis of the first four interviews, the considerations, their ways of searching and utilize inspirations, as well as problems that frequently appear in the actual design phase (communication part in agencies are much more complicated), are similar. I'll talk into those similarities in detailed in the next section "Similarities", so if someone wants to adapt my methods to improve brand manifestation design in agencies, they may have a clearer starting point.

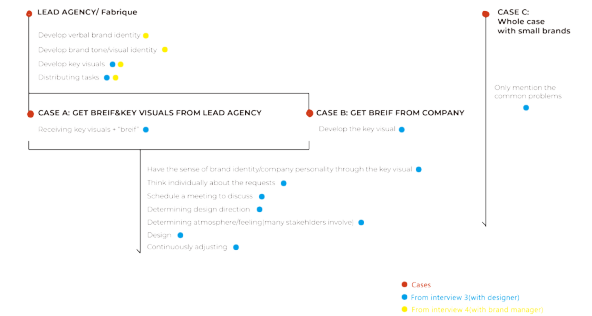


Figure 4.2 Journey in design/advertising agencies

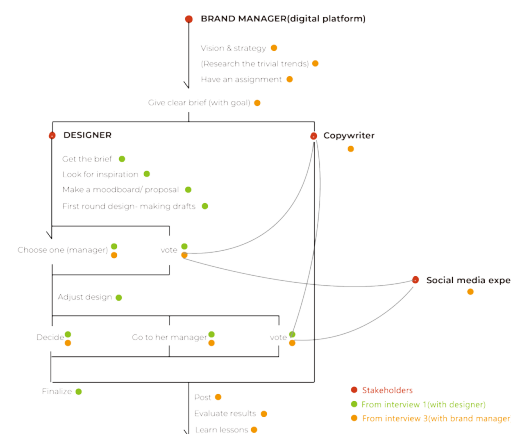


Figure 4.1 Journey in Blue Tulip Award of Accenture

### SIMILARITIES

#### Similar considerations

As shown in Figure 4.3, when designing manifestations, designers need to consider not only the brief but also brand identity and visual identity no matter they work for agencies or a certain brand. For digital marketing manifestations, the **key message** is particularly important, Interviewee 4 said, "I think social media is one of the areas where, in fact, the visual identity is so limited. It's more about messages than about the identity." and different activities have their own key messages.

But in research, the **key visual** is a normal material for agencies but not for internal branding department and that's because agencies have a strict division of work, sometimes a big case can be distributed to different agencies. For example, leading agency will fix the brand and distribute small tasks, like social media operation, to local agencies. So brief received by local agency usually comes along with key visuals.

The requests part is interesting. First, designers seldom get well-structured brief, it's just a series of requests, for example, "Okay, I trust you. I just need a few small elements around it. There were also a few visuals around the same event that already had some elements." or "Yeah, you can feel free to use those. I need it to be happy, exciting, like pop...," said by interviewee 3. And secondly, All of the brief tend to **leave designers enough freedom**, to let them do "designer thing". And those happen both in agencies and internal branding department.

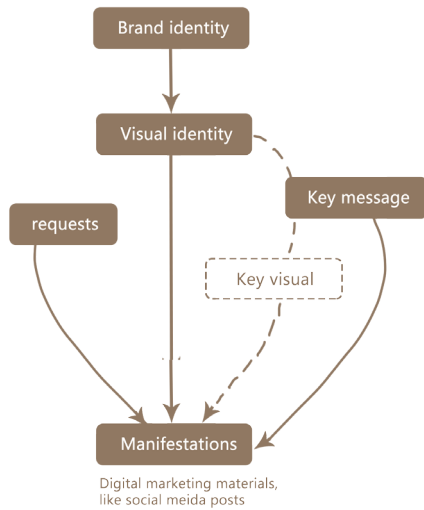


Figure 4.3 What need to be considered when designing manifestations?

### Brand managers & Clients

The role of brand managers in the internal branding department is similar to the role of clients in agencies. They are the ones who make requests and have the final say on the manifestations. Besides, brand managers in internal branding department usually don't have a design background and neither do clients. So ways of enhancing communication efficiency in my concepts should also suit the context of agencies. Just replace the role of brand managers by clients.

### Similar general process & tools

Although the working style and communication part (there are more co-workers stand between designers and clients in an agency) are quite different, the actual design phase is similar, as shown in Figure 4.4. And they basically use the same tools/ methods like mood boards and the brand book.

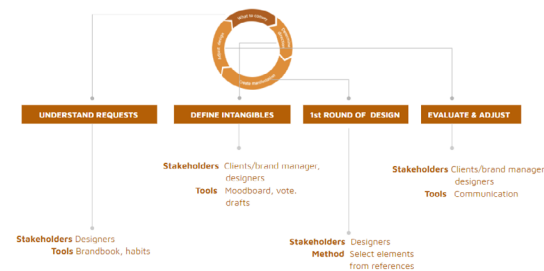


Figure 4.4 Similar process & tools

Figure 4.4 demonstrated the general process of brand manifestation design. In the beginning, designers try to understand requests given by brand managers or clients, and then take a look at given materials, search keywords online or check the brand book to get a rough idea about what to convey in the manifestation. In the second phase, designers usually make mood boards or drafts, drafts are used if clients/managers really lack imagination, to communicate with other stakeholders in order to eliminate uncertainties as much as possible. After this phase, designers normally know which direction to go so they can start 1st round of design. They usually search for more inspirations and utilize all kinds of reference for manifestation design. Finally, in the last phase, other stakeholders(manager/clients and sometimes co-workers) will evaluate the manifestation so designers adjust it again and again according to feedbacks till it's ready to post.

### FINAL DESIGN DIRECTION

There are three design directions (Figure 4.5) after data analysis of the first four interviews. At that time I wished to decide one direction to continue my following interviews and session and Direction 2 about reference&elements was chosen after discussing with chair and mentor. However, later in ideation phase (I stuck at the ideation phase for some time so I had to look back at the data) when I re-organized findings, I realized that it's almost impossible to improve the experience by only focused on phase 3, the first round of design, because many problems

#### Direction 1

UNDERSTAND INTANGIBLES | DEFINE INTANGIBLES | DESIGN INTANGIBLES | VALIDATE

1-How to locate right feeling/atmosphere?  
Communicate through visuals

To understand intangibles individually(before visuals): brandbook, brief, experience

Define intangibles with others:  
-Communicating with non-designer: visuals are needed  
-Gain advice from non-designer: easier with visuals  
-Clients may misunderstand the direction shown in moodboard  
-Tend to give designer enough freedom

Current problems of using moodboard/drafts:

FOR BRAINSTORMING TOPIC:  
1. What the best form of visuals to convey the intangibles?  
2. How to reduce the time of making moodboard/draft?

NEW NOW | Draft | Moodboard | Dilemma list

#### Direction 2

UNDERSTAND INTANGIBLES | DEFINE INTANGIBLES | DESIGN INTANGIBLES | VALIDATE

2-How to design intangibles efficiently?  
Enough references & elements

-Lack of clear reference (biggest problems for designers in both agency and internal department)  
-No key visuals for IDP  
-Cause the hard time when designing visuals (individually)  
-Designers see demonstration inspiration/brand tone... to design  
-Store responses behind the design

Current process of searching inspiration:

FOR BRAINSTORMING TOPIC:  
1. How to gain enough relevant references?  
2. How to balance elements from different resources

#### Direction 3

UNDERSTAND INTANGIBLES | DEFINE INTANGIBLES | DESIGN INTANGIBLES | VALIDATE

3- Who should evaluate manifestation?  
Involve users in an efficient way

-Manager have the final cut. (Internal branding department)  
-Clients have the final cut. (Agency)  
Missing: TA(target audience)/consumers  
-Tips for communication with manager & coworkers: convince them with good reasoning and good feedback

Current process of evaluation:   
Useful feedback & useless feedback:

FOR BRAINSTORMING TOPIC:  
1. How to involve TA in an efficient way?  
2. Which aspects should be tested by TA?

Figure 4.5 Three possible directions

that designers face in this phase are caused by habits/ actions in previous phases or wrong mindsets. For example, one of the causes of "couldn't find nice searching words for inspirations" is because the designer neither gets clear information in the first place nor define a key message by themselves. So I took a step back, listed all the problems in the journey and tried to find out the root causes and then brainstormed solutions.

A detailed version of designers' journey map(in internal branding department) will be shown in 4.3 Detailed journey map & Existing problems.

4.2 |

## How do brand designers utilize reference ?

### WHAT IS REFERENCE?

It's a common problem for designers

In all interviews with designers, they mentioned difficulties when it comes to reference, such as " ...the most difficult part I would say is between step two and three(process drawn by him), like I said, sometimes I don't have a clear reference. Then I just have to do and try a lot by myself. That's difficult. If I have references, this part should be easier," said by interview 1 in internal branding department. And when I asked interviewee 2, who works in an advertising agency, "What are the most common problems you encounter when designing manifestation" her answer was "Incomplete materials". And similar problems were brought up in creativity session either. It seems like a common problem for brand designers no matter in agencies or internal branding department.

And it is also closely related to design elements, which will be mentioned later, that in brand manifestation design, designers choose and utilize design elements from reference.

### Meaning of "reference" in this project

The definition of reference is quite broad. I'd like to describe it based on what I gathered from research. As shown in Figure 4.6, on the one hand, reference includes **materials** which help designers make consistent manifestations and they can be key visuals, brandbook or brand pillars like "Craftsmanship" and "Decent" in Secrid and normally provided by clients or brand manager, and on the other hand, it includes **inspirations** collected by designers herself/himself or design team, such as online pictures, exhibitions photos and even pages ripped from a magazine.



Figure 4.6 The relationship

### MATERIALS

#### Types and quality of materials

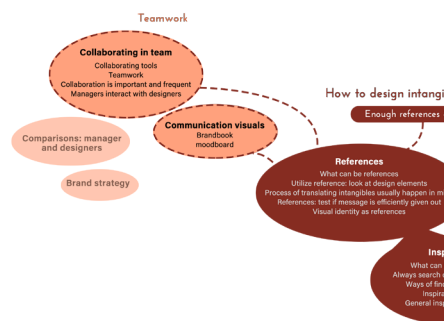
Collection of materials normally happen before the first round of design. Designers in agencies usually get more materials compared to designers in the internal department, especially visual materials. Materials are provided by clients or brand managers to help designers better understand what they expect.

In agencies, materials can be key messages as well as key visuals, some visual examples(like artwork) and previous work, compulsory fonts, brand book and so on. And the forms are diverse, in interview 4, the brand manager mentioned once they even used animation+different combination of music to convey the brand identity. In internal branding department, types of materials are more limited but it also depends on manager/clients' background. One designer said he received visual

examples frequently and he's in a company founded by designers, "But the founders of Secrid are creators at heart... So most of time... also the founder will say: look, look, I have this picture. This is also nice. Or I have this on my phone. Yeah, she's giving input, a lot of input," but if it's a company whose manager is not equipped with related abilities, there are only verbal requests in most of the time (interview 1).

Apart from the types, the quality of given materials is closely related to the **background of the brand manager**. Because in both interviews and session, participants mentioned the influence of backgrounds. If brand manager (or co-workers/clients) has no design background, it's easier to communicate with visuals and for people who have a really limited imagination, designers have to use drafts, "But for example, when you found that this client has no imagination at all during contact, and then you have to make a draft, such as a fake picture that looks very real to him," said by interviewee 2. However, in another context, said by interviewee 6.

More information about communicating through visual materials is in the orange part (teamwork) of the category map and details can be found in codebook.



orange part (teamwork) in category map

There are different ways to search for inspiration. And the better inspiration you find, the more impressive the final outputs may be. However, nowadays every designer uses Pinterest, Behance for inspirations so searching words matters. Except that, one of the interviews mentioned his way of collecting inspirations, general inspiration injection, he has followed some design agencies on Instagram or Behance profiles. Daily or couple times a week, he looks at those just for curiosity, not even like really have to find something. And those can all turn to inspirations if necessary. Besides, some team own inspiration library, they keep gathering stuff along the way and share the resources.

There is a variety of forms of inspiration. Some interviewees mentioned multi-sense inspiration, like go to museums and exhibitions. And after mood board is used to define direction, it also becomes one of the most important inspirations.



Some examples of inspirations

## HOW DO DESIGNERS UTILIZE ELEMENTS WHEN MAKING MANIFESTATIONS?

### What are elements

A brand manifestation is made of a number of elements, like colours, fonts, typographic and so on. All elements build together to convey information and feelings. When I asked designers where do those elements come from, answers are broad. The colours may be chosen from one of the inspirations, the small components could be extended from the key visual and they can be derived from the feeling of brand, features of service or keywords in brand identity.

Interesting thing is that elements are not always under control. One of interviewee talked about the main colours of the brand changed because the colour of the central wall in office was painted lighter than the original plan. So from that point, the olive green in their visual identity system was changed to mustard yellow.

### How to decide elements

Since there are countless kinds of elements, the ways of choosing which one to use are also quite different. I'd like to give 2 examples to help see that differences

"...we kind of have brand pillars like craftsmanship and stuff like that. And we kind of looked at it when we made a design. Okay, we made a design and is this too much? Is this too serious? Or does it need to be more serious? We kind of balanced those ingredient..."

(interview 6)

"...to be more relaxed, there is an option to make the picture a bit brighter. But if it is a well-regulated brand, I might add some beating elements as small details. For example, I made a poster for Christmas. This brand does not have exaggerated features, so we wouldn't consider Christmas tree but we address a few light spots on the black background. To create a hazy image."

(interview 2)

Clearly, both of them mentioned balancing those elements and designers play around elements and try to make it impressive but fit the brand, "...if I would be making poster, let's say for myself, I would make it totally different than making a poster for Secrid or making a poster for a state or a different brand, like Nike, whatever. So that's being said is that you have to look at what is the essence of the messenger," said interviewee 6. And in creativity session, when it came to What are the difficulties (related to references) in brand manifestation design? The top three questions are about "how to be different?", "how to fit clients' requests?" and "how to deal with elements from different resources?" So the main concern about dealing with elements is how to reach the balance between "fit the brand" and "innovative".

### "Brand fit"

Since the tool I'll develop is for digital marketing manifestation, the key message is usually not so complicated. So the key is to **find the proper feeling or values which the brand want their target audience to associate with the brand** and then **successfully convey the feelings**. In design/advertising agencies, this usually decided by clients, because on the one hand, they have the final say, and on the other hand, "... clients have to think from the consumers' point of view to boost consumption," mentioned by interviewee 2 so it's also reasonable. But in internal branding department, things can be a bit different. Designers are familiar with the brand after working a period of time. According to interviews, when a brand designer first encounters the brand, make manifestation "brand fit" is harder but once they get familiar with the brand the harder part becomes making manifestations innovative.

### "Innovative"

I use the word "innovative" to make contrast with "brand fit". It's meant to describe that designers want to make something different from previous work/ brand images and wish to infuse new blood in their design.

In regard to make innovative manifestations, association mind map could be a direction, according to interviewee 1, "If someone told me 'cheerful', I will just search in my mind, what kinds of things are cheerful. It could be pictures, things I've seen before. And then I will go to that picture and find some elements in it." And because those associations are based on personal experiences, it can be a differentiator.

Interestingly, another interviewee use associations of the brand to make something different in manifestation, "we look at, ok, how can we give it a twist or give it a thing we haven't seen before, but still have the resemblance with the brand and Secrid, as I said, is pretty humble or modest. Um, kind of in we call 'yin and yang' we tried to really work from those contrasts. So we would make a very small letter and combine it with like a big picture or different ways around." In this way, they actually made associations twice, the first one is from "humble and modest" to "Yin Yang" (in Taiji, ), and then from this pattern (Figure 4.5) they got the idea of playing around with "contrast".



Figure 4.8 Pattern of Yin and Yang

## INSPIRATIONS

Designers is always searching for inspirations. At first, they do that when making the mood board and they continuously looking for new inspirations, no matter in internal branding department (a) or agencies (b).

a. "Even sometimes we say 'okay, that's it', we come up with new things, but mostly because from our side, we realize like 'Okay, there is something more that we would like to communicate' and we forgot to put that aspect in the visual. So then we go again"

(interview 3)

b. "But even when we're making stuff, we are still looking at inspiration and still like even comparing and saying are we still on the right track? or can we push it to another level? So even for per copywriting we like... find examples that weren't in the first mood board."

(interview 6)

# Detailed journey map & Existing problems

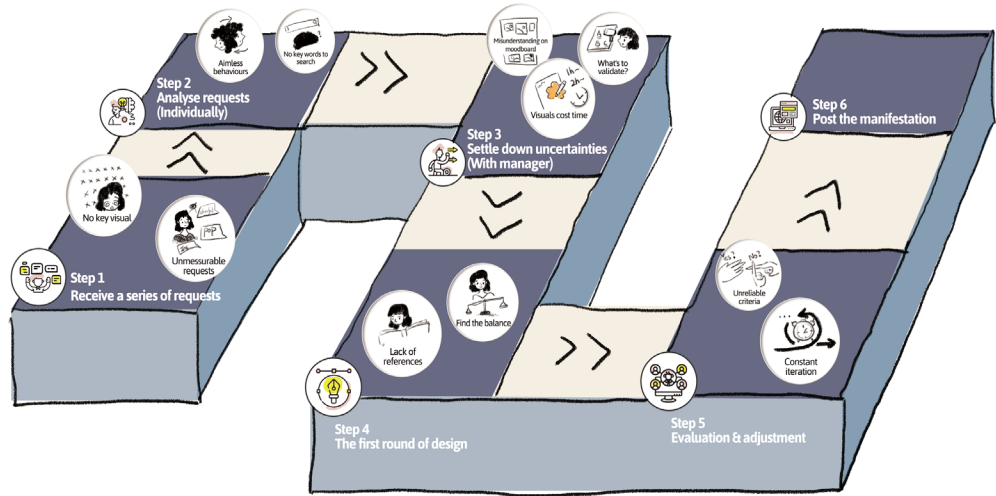


Figure 4.7 Detailed journey map & Existing problems

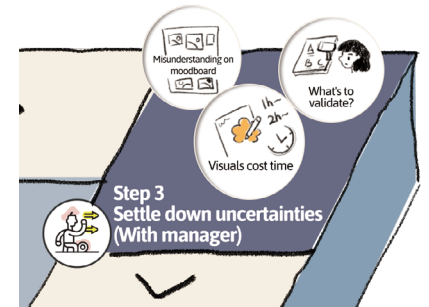
then I also gave the designer the freedom to come up with certain elements around the visual that could, like complement the overall design. And I gave the designers the freedom to do it on his own. So I just explain like *“okay, I trust you. I just need a few small elements around it. There were also a few visuals around the same event that already had some elements.”* And then I also gave the designer the freedom to come up with certain elements around the visual so I just explain like *“Yeah, you can feel free to use those. I need it to be happy, exciting, like pop”* (Interview 3)

communicate with the manager. Currently, there are two problems.

**Firstly**, designers greatly depend on brand manager's preference, so in this stage designers usually assume WHAT THE MANAGER LIKES and then use tools like moodboard to validate. However, what manager likes may not be the best solution considering she/he only takes no more than 3 minutes to evaluate the mood board, and it's hard for brand managers (especially the ones without design background) to align what they choose now with the look of the final manifestation and this situation happens in advertisement agency too, "...there are also some clients thinking the mood board looks nice but why your design doesn't feel the same way as the mood board," said by interviewee 2. So maybe it would be better for both designers and brand managers to discuss and find the overall direction (like storyline of the manifestation) at first, after all this is the biggest uncertainty that needs to be eliminated.

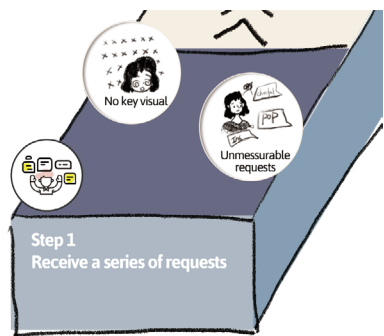
## STEP 2 ANALYSE REQUESTS

The second step for designers is to **understand requests and figure out what they want to do**. In some occasions, the requests from managers are rather simple so they need time to think and find a starting point. For example, in interview 6, interviewee mentioned that the founder just announces, *“ Mom's day is coming, let's do something about it”*.



Designers usually prepare individually in this step before actually MAKE something. For instance, **Interviewee 2** often looks through client's brand book and does a little research of target audience; **interviewee 1** likes to search keywords in requests online for inspiration, no matter they are pictures, website or articles; interviewee 6 thinks about which personality of the brand could fit the theme and **interviewee 5** looks at competitors' work for inspiration. However, none of the interviewees included this phase specifically in their design process because it's more like an inconspicuous habit instead of a real step. They behave without a clear purpose and in the session, one designer mentioned that *“it's hard to find right keywords to search”*.

**Secondly**, communicating through visuals is vital but it takes a lot of time and efforts. All designers in my interviews stressed the necessity of visuals, especially when they communicate with non-designers, but making visuals also cost time and the schedule is usually quite tight for digital marketing.



## STEP 1 RECEIVE A SERIES OF REQUESTS

### Process & problems

In the beginning, **designers receive a series of requests instead of a proper design brief**. And in internal branding department, brand managers seldom give designers visual examples in this phase while designers in agencies usually received key visuals as reference. There are two reasons for this phenomenon. On the one hand, it's because brand managers in internal branding department are usually without a design background, and on the other hand, they leave some freedom on purpose to encourage designers to propose something new, "I think it's important to give enough freedom to designer to, like, come up with a good visual and to propose something," a brand manager in an internal department (interviewee 3) said and she just

gives simple requests and explain what she wants to achieve through this manifestation, like "convey the feeling of happiness, excitement".

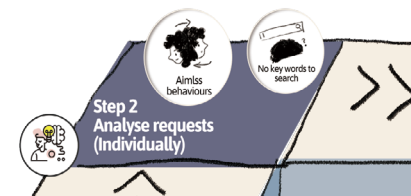
### Two different types of requests

By analyzing interviews (including the one with the designer in agency), I divided the common requests into 2 types. One type is clear and measurable, such as fonts, colours and the size of the manifestation. The other type of requests is hard to measure, like feelings, a certain atmosphere or goals. The visual interpretations of those abstract words are countless. And in my interviews, it shows that how well designers can translate those unmeasurable requests in the manifestation greatly depends on their experience.

Requests	Measurable	eg. Fonts, standard, size...
	unmeasurable	eg. Feeling, atmosphere, goals/themes...

### \*Example of requests:

*“Okay, listen, these are the colours I want to use. You've already used them for the visuals, this is the font that I want to use. Please put it here and here and there...”* and I physically pointed out where I would like it to be. And

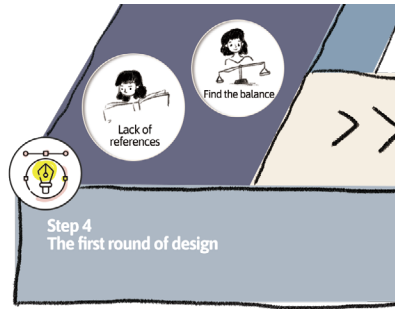


## STEP 3 SETTLE DOWN UNCERTAINTIES

Uncertainties are usually the visual expressions of unmeasurable requests I mentioned above, like "cheerful feeling", "something pops". Designers try to translate those in visuals (usually through mood board or drafts) to

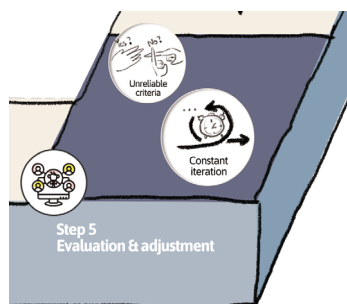
## STEP 4 THE FIRST ROUND OF DESIGN

The third stage is the first round of design. **This stage includes searching for inspirations and utilizing different reference (inspirations & materials)**. Interview 2 has pointed out that for him this stage is the most difficult and time-consuming and there are two reasons, **lack of references** and **find the balance between "brand fit" and "diviating"**. Other designers in interviews also mentioned these problems, "I would say you have to always find the brand fit. So if I would be making a poster, let's say for myself, I would make it totally different than making a poster for Secrid or making a poster for a state or a different brand, like Nike...But we do want to make different things." said by interview 6.

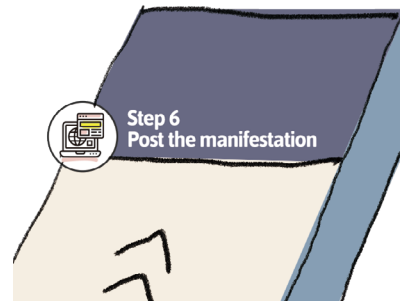


## STEP 5 EVALUATION & ADJUSTMENT

The fifth stage is the evaluation and adjustment stage. **In this stage, the brand manager or sometimes other co-workers will give suggestions about the manifestation and designers will improve it according to those feedbacks.** Different from agencies, designers in internal branding department hardly evaluate the manifestation with the target audience. Interviewee 1 said it's because the manager has the final cut and the limited time & budget. **It seems that the manager, as the decision-maker, becomes the spokesman for both target audiences and the brand.** However, in my data analysis, although there's no doubt that brand managers are familiar with the brand, their perception of the brand is based on daily experiences. Actually, it couldn't blame to brand managers since many companies don't have a clear brand identity or a systematic brand book. *"we often have to repair the brand because 'we have some values, We have principles, we have blablabla', But you know, they never have things in place, like a brand book like you are taught. So it(reality)'s always totally different. So often we have to repair the brands first,"* said interviewee 4, who is the manager of a design agency.



Apart from these, **constant iteration** is also a problem, sometimes even things are almost done, a new nice inspiration(could be a nice picture) may drag everybody back to the starting point.



## STEP 6 POST THE MANIFESTATION

After the manifestation is done, the last stage is **to upload and post it with the texts from other colleagues.** Sometimes brand manager will do this job. And in most of time, that's when designers' mission is accomplished.

4.4 |

# Three standards for brand manifestations

## LACK OF GUIDELINES

In internal branding department, designers usually depend on the brand manager to evaluate the quality of the manifestation, especially when there are no clear guidelines like the brand book. interviewee 1 said, *"When I first come here, I had no idea of what styles they want. Although there is a brand book, it's hard to understand because it's not clear and vague, probably lack of guidelines, I have to try a lot, so around a month, I tried to understand and check everything with the manager"* And even when they get through the transitional period and get familiar with the brand, it still cost a lot of time to schedule meetings with managers to adjust the design. And I believe it's not the single case since both interviewees in agencies mentioned that many brands don't have brand books or clear identity. *"we often have to repair the brand because 'we have some values, We have principles, we have blablabla', But you know, they never have things in place, like a brand book like you are taught. So it(reality)'s always totally different."* said by interviewee 4.

So if there are general guidelines or standards for brand manifestations, designers should be able to self-evaluate their design first and know which direction to work on.

## WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO A NICE MANIFESTATION?

In creativity session, I asked 5 participants to brainstorm the characteristic of a nice brand manifestation, and then let them put those characteristics into the axis(Y: innovative, X:fit the brand) in order to break "fit the brand and inspirational" down to several more specific characteristics. As a result, three characteristics that make a manifestation meet both requirements are: **"Consistent and inspirational"**, **"Rationale"** and **"express key information"** Bearing those in mind, I looked back to data generated from interviews and further developed them into three standards which can be used to evaluate the quality of brand manifestations:

1. **Balance between "brand fit" and "innovative"**
2. **The ability to express key information**
3. **Clear rationale behind visuals**

In validation phase, I also let participants evaluate the three standards and all of them agree with these. So these three standards can be the ultimate goals of a brand manifestation and the tool that I developed is supposed to help brand designers achieve them.

### *Balance between "brand fit" and "innovative"*

It has been mentioned before in **"HOW DO DESIGNERS UTILIZE ELEMENTS WHEN MAKING MANIFESTATIONS?"**

### *The ability to express key information*

After settling down the key message and unmeasurable factors(brand values, feelings, atmosphere and so on), it's important to communicate those to the target audience as precisely as possible. And that's what a fine manifestation need to achieve.

### *Clear rationale behind visuals*

"Rationale" here not only means the stories or strategy behind manifestations, but also means the reason why a designer use a certain element, such as colors and typographic, in the manifestation, for example, *"It's a common sense that light green gives a feeling of fresh and 'fresh' is what we try to show in this campaign. so I choose green as the main color"*.

Interviewee 3, the brand manager in internal branding department, also mentioned that she'd like to hear designer explain story or story behind the manifestations, *" I think it's also very important to explain the strategy behind certain design. So not just look those colors go nice together or like these shapes or whatever, right? But explain the story behind... like the strategy behind it."* However, few designers in my research did that.

## Requirements of the future tools

### REQUIREMENTS OF THE TOOL



#### CHARACTERISTICS OF DIGITAL MARKETING

"Quick response", "catch up with trivial trends", "visuals really matter"..



#### TIME LIMITED

"quick response", "catch up with trivial trends", "visuals really matter"..

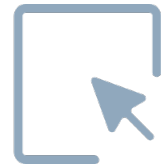


#### PROVIDE CONTROL GROUP

In creativity session, a cluster of ideas with the vote of "resonate" is Providing the control group. It could be looked at in two different perspectives.

On the one hand, it's about how to precisely locate target elements. When communicating with manager/ clients before design. Not only ask what they like, but also ask what they dislike. Because sometimes when brand manager agrees with the moodboard, it's still tricky to find out she want what exact elements in it and it leads to misunderstanding. "Some clients have a clear idea that if our direction is on the track. But there are also some thinking the moodboard looks nice but why your design don't feel the same way as the moodboard," said by interviewee 2. So ask about two extremes should help with that.

And on the other hand, look at the competitors when collecting inspirations. It can help you decide which way to go or not to go.



#### PROVIDE LOT'S OF OPTIONS

" It should give me lots of choices of those styles. For example, If I only have 10 cards and discuss with my manager, and that's definitely not enough."

# CHAPTER 5 | IDEA ITERATION

This chapter introduces three concepts and instructions of those methods. A roadmap and the way of a new workflow being created will be demonstrated. In the beginning, idea iteration process and how validation tests contribute to it will be shown.

### In this chapter

- 5.1 Idea iteration process & Validation
- 5.2 Final concepts & examples

# IDEA ITERATION PROCESS & VALIDATION

## INTRODUCTION

One of the most serious problems is that designer depends too much on **manager's decision**, look at the journey I made before, what designers do is trying to figure out what the manager wants. But not until step 5, brand manager make decisions basically "blindly", because even if tools like mood board help but there are still many problems like I mentioned before, for example, don't know what to validate. So manifestation made by the original journey is, kind of like, built above an unstable cloud(Figure 6.1).

The new workflow created by using the methods has a reliable foundation and designers should always be able to tell the manager the reason why he/she designed in this way(standard 3: Clear rationale behind visuals) and how the manifestation not only achieves a good balance(standard 1: Balance between "brand fit" and "innovative") but also conveys the right messages successfully(standard 2: The ability to express key information). Instead of guessing what managers like, it should be better to persuade the manager.

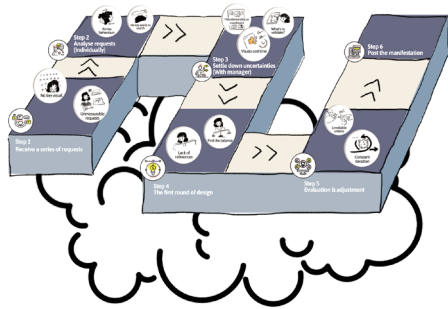


Figure 6.1 The original journey

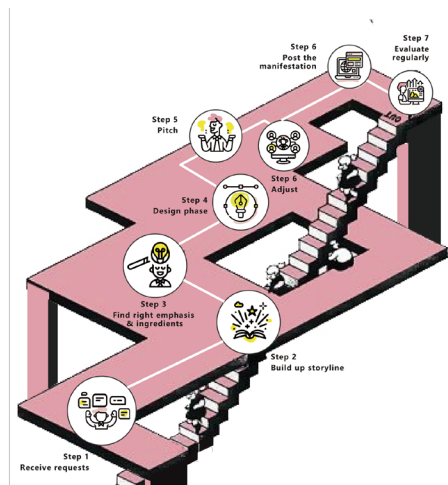


Figure 6.2 New work flow

## IDEA ITERATION & VALIDATION

After conceptualization, I started three round of validation. First, a self-evaluation was done by reflecting my design goals and by reading literature relevant to the concepts(for example, Find your inspiration: exploring different levels of abstraction in textual stimuli). Secondly, the concepts were tested with three designers by interviews and some of them also provided useful insights for a later iteration. However, due to the distance restriction caused by COVID-19, all the test were conducted online, which inevitably limited the quality of the test. In the end, I set a face-to-face experiment with interviewee 1 who was also a participant in the former research and let him employ these methods to a real case, which is **"To design a manifestation for social media as a reminder to notify that semi-final of Blue Tulip Award will be held around next spring in Amsterdam"**, which he got from manager recently. I introduced to him the methods step by step and then observed what he did each step and check if the methods work well. This test took about 2.5 hours and after that, there was a short interview. There are some interesting feedbacks that I got from this test.

Instead of creating an individual section for validation results, I put the feedbacks, reflections and my adjustment according to the feedbacks into **a blue square with a plus icon on the left**. And an example was set in Figure 6.3

In one of the tests, participant questioned about this picture(left) that I used in presentation. "This is a famous paradox, this kind of space doesn't exist. It doesn't support your point I think." I haven't realized it until she mentioned so later a small adjustment was made on this picture.

Figure 6.3 An example of validation results & my adjustment

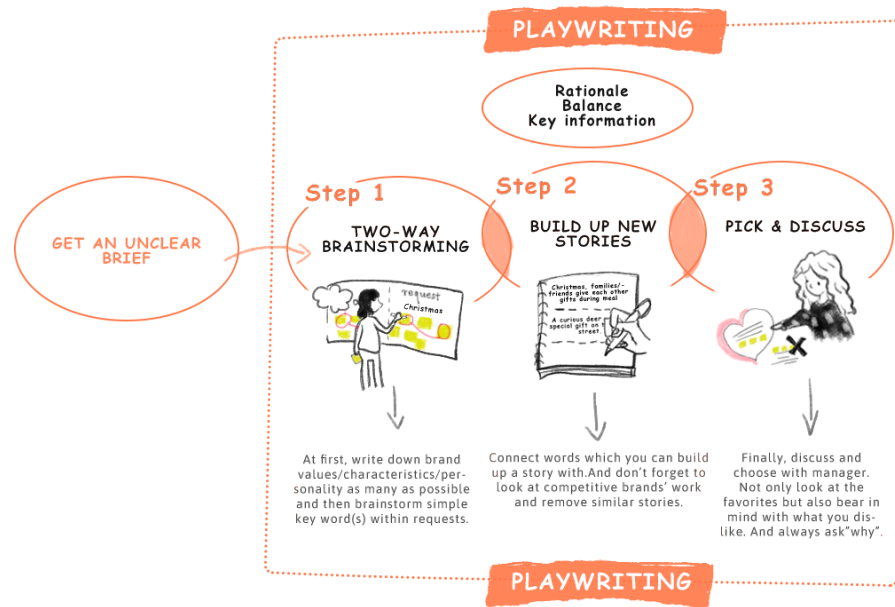
# CONCEPTS

## CONCEPT A

# Playwrighting

## A Good Start of Your Manifestation

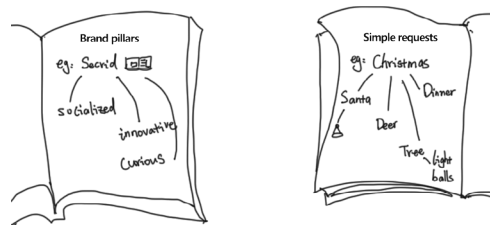




To start: Designers receive simple requests ...

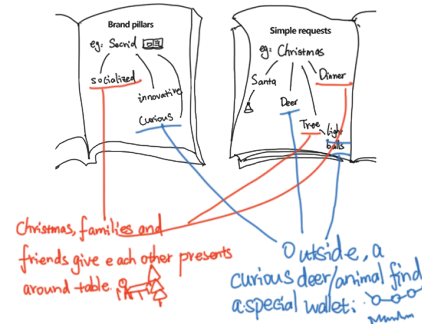
Step 1

Although some brands don't have a clear or up-to-date brand book, designers in internal branding department can easily name various brand characteristics and values. So instead of fixing the brand systematically, designers could start from what they've already had. So at first, **write down key words like brand personalities, characteristics of the brand and brand values as many as possible** and then **based on simple key word(s) in the requests, start a 3-5 minutes brainstorm**. I'll take a simple example to show how this method works. The requests from brand manager is "To design a manifestation on Instagram for Secrid's Christmas promotion"



Step 2

**Connect words which you can build up a story with.** It's kind of like the game we played in kindergarten. Because of different experiences or background, different individuals will come up with their own version of stories. **And don't forget to look at competitive brand and remove the similar stories of posts/campaign.**



Step 3

**After finishing those short stories, which are like scripts of the final manifestation, discuss and choose with manager. You should not only pick the favorites but also point out what you really disapprove/dislike. And always ask "why".** It will help locate what need to bear in mind and what to avoid. In the first creativity session, participants mentioned the importance of providing counterexamples several times. Besides the stories, designer should also look at key words behind, such as "socialized", "tree", "dinner" and if designer feels hard to decide which one to emphasize or what other small components to involve, please go to concept B.

In internal branding department, designers often suffer from insufficient reference and unclear brief. Unlike designers in agencies can receive key visuals, designers in internal branding department often receive a series of simple requests in words. And since many companies don't have a clear brand identity, designers largely rely on managers to make the final decision and tend to assume their preferences instead of thinking what is needed, what's more, managers usually make decisions upon an experience which make their choices less convincing.

Apart from nice visuals, the brand manager also expects to hear the story or strategy behind it. But designers seldom do so.

TARGETS

Brand designers, brand managers

APPLICABLE STAGE(S)

Stage 2. When designers receive simple requests and don't know where to start.

PURPOSE

1. To find the best direction together with manager.
2. Consider about the "brand fit" and "deviating" before looking for reference.
3. Use verbal description instead of visuals to communicate with non-designers and save time (but it still works for non-designers).
4. Build rationale behind manifestations.



Self-reflections

An article, *Find your inspiration: exploring different levels of abstraction in textual stimuli*, mentioned why it's difficult for designers to translate texts into visuals. It's because it requires a higher level of abstraction. A series of requests are abstract but if there's a story, it should be easier to make visuals about it. Also, designers can complete this transition step by step following this method. haven't realized it until she mentioned so later a small adjustment was made on this picture.



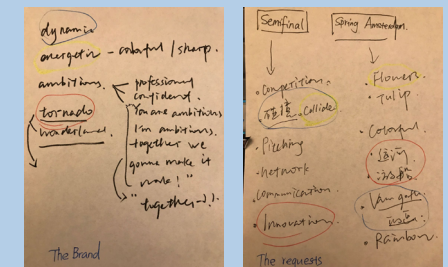
Validation tests

In online validation tests, participants had very positive emotion to this concept. They liked the form and thought it's easy to use. One of the participants remarked it as the most useful one (among three concepts) for her situation because her manager always give her rough

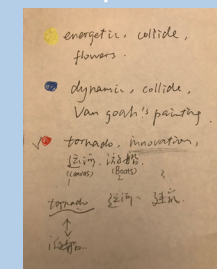
In the offline validation experiment, participant easily understood the method and finished the first two steps in 8 minutes. But later on, we spent some time to discuss which story to pick and I found out that **it's really important to keep asking "why"** because sometimes we have different understandings of what he expected to convey through those stories. So I add this point to Step 3.

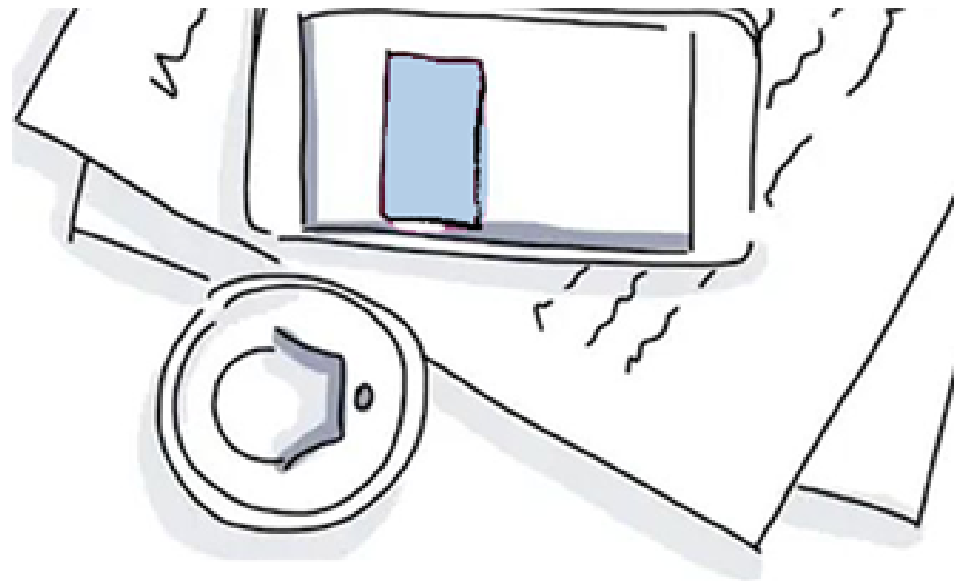
Another interesting thing is that instead of **complete sentences**, the participant only used **3-5 keywords** to describe the story. However, it doesn't have any negative impact for this step (it even saved time) but **it made the next method a bit difficult to continue**. It's easy to forget some elements within the story, for example, he wrote down "tornado", "innovation", "canvas" and "boats" to stand for the story "In spring, A tornado encounters boats in an Amsterdam canvas (and break them into pieces which is like a destructive innovation)", those key words work perfectly in this method but when it came to concept 2, we kept forgetting about showing the "spring" part.

Step 1: Two-way brainstorming



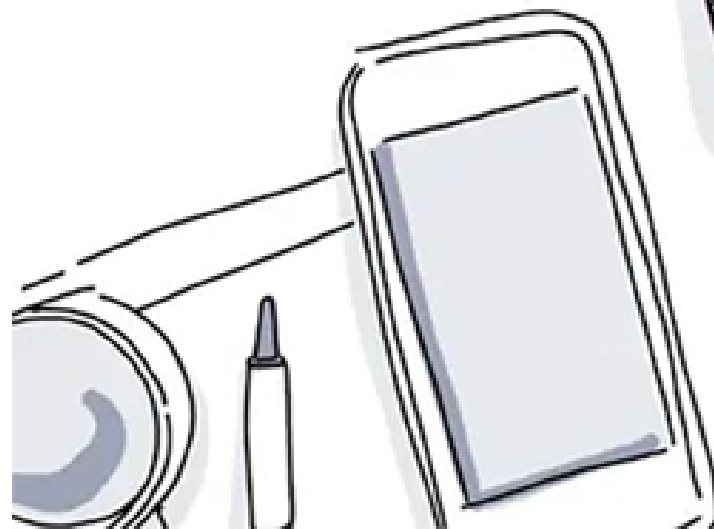
Step 2: Build up new stories





## Mood board

A Goal-oriented Method to Find Right Emphasis and Ingredients



## HOW IT WORKS

To start: Make a manifestation about "Christmas, families/friends/colleagues gather together around table and open gifts(Wallet)" and convey a joyful feeling.

### Step 1

There are four main manifestation elements (colour tone, core components, extra components and uncertain key information) are listed in different colours, as shown in Figure 6.4. Uncertain key information means the emphasis which we feel difficult to decide. In this example, uncertain key information is "which group of people can convey the value of 'socialized' the best" because "socialized" can be expressed by a group of families, friends or even colleagues and the brand, Secrid(wallet), seems to fit in all those scenarios.



Figure 6.4 four main manifestation elements

- Q1. Is Colour tone supposed to give audience the feeling of "warm" or "light"?
- Q2. What should be the Core components in the manifestation?
- Q3. Which extra components should be stressed more? "gifts" or "dinner"?
- Q4. Which group is better to demonstrate "socialized"- "family"/"friends" or "colleagues" ?

\* Four questions about right emphasises & components

### Step 2

Search for pictures to make a Validation moodboard whose goal is to answer questions above and reduce uncertainties. This process is similar to the way of making traditional moodboards. For example, type "Christmas" "family" in Pinterest and choose one that looks joyful. Then add four colours posters upon the chosen picture like adding tags. Just like Figure 6.5. And all those picture will form a validation moodboard.



Figure 6.5 Example of a validation moodboard

### Step 3

Thirdly, let manager chooses pictures, still, like & dislike. Brand managers should choose not only their favorites but also what they disapprove/dislike. And designers should remember to ask for reasons behind their choices.



### Step 4

In the end, according to the previous step, it's quite obvious that which brand elements should be included in the final manifestation. In this case, we can summarize the message that the manifestation should not include clear human figures and it would be better to use lighter colours to demonstrate the joyful feeling. Even if it's a Christmas party/dinner among friends, the focus should be on gifts instead of food/meal itself. With these pictures and this message in mind, it's quite clear about the emphasis as well as components in the manifestation and designer can start first round of design and pitch to manager with reasonable argument.

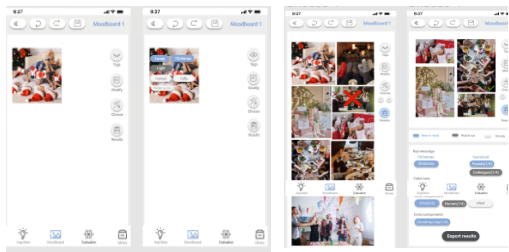


## FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

In order to provide data for concept C, I further developed this concept. No matter designer use the traditional tools (posters and printed pictures) or the digital plug-in shown in this page, the method is the same. Although I use the form of an application to show how it works digitally, it can also be a plug-in on the computer or ipad.

Digital plug-in is much more convenient than using printed pictures and colourful posters, and it could provide actionable data for brand reflection and improvement.

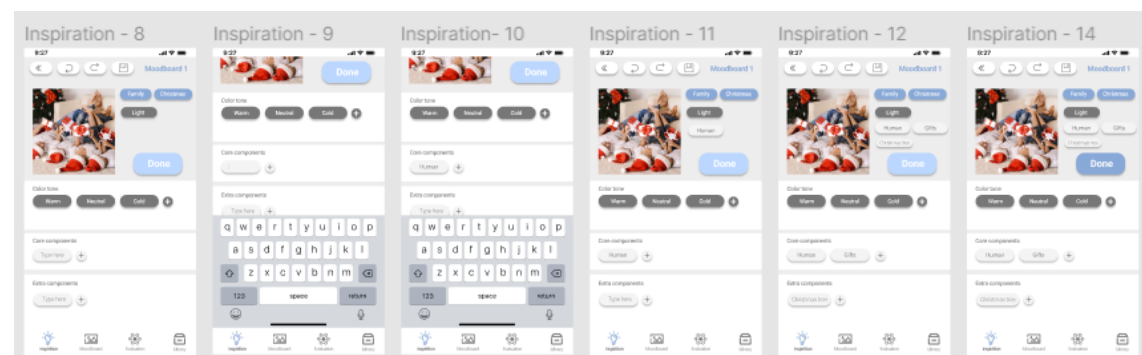
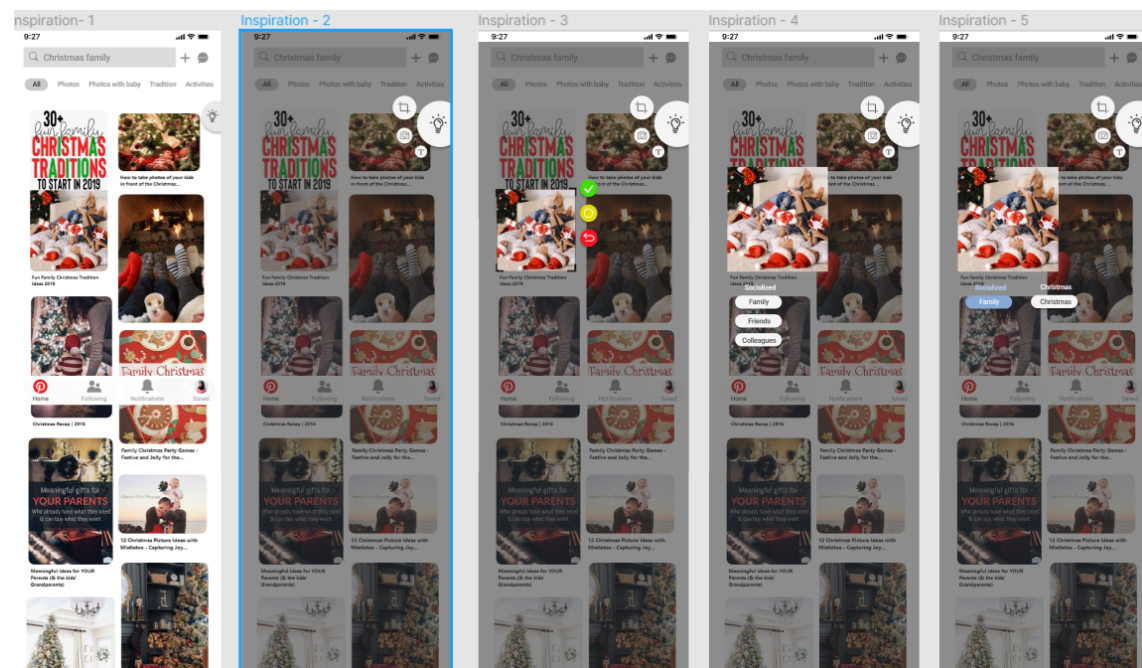
\*I'll show how it works in presentation with gif.



### Validation tests

In online validation tests, two participants suggested to make prototype of a website plug-in instead of the prototype on phone. Because designers need to show pictures to others and the bigger screen should be easier to watch or interact.

On the one hand, these are very reasonable suggestions, but on the other hand, I found out they didn't realize my concept is a method to find right emphasis and ingredients for the manifestation rather than a specific tool (like a website plug-in or an application). So I add this paragraph to stress that it's just a digitalized possibilities for the method. Even without it, designers could still use it with posters, pictures and pens.



## BACKGROUND

Before making manifestation, even if the storyline is clear it's still irritating to figure out how to visualize the story, such as what things should be stressed in the manifestation and what dominant colours should be.

No matter in internal branding department or agencies, designers like using mood board to find the right style and ingredients. However, different individuals have different associations of one picture so misunderstanding is inevitable when designers and manger/clients communicating through moodboard. Besides, during data analysis, I found designers tend to use moodboard (or chosen pictures in moodboard) as an important reference in next stage of designing manifestation, they learn from those and extract certain brand elements, such as typographic, colours and small components, for instance, the sunshine or a beach chair, and implement it in the manifestation.

## TARGETS

Brand designers, brand managers

## APPLICABLE STAGE(S)

**Stage 3.** When there's a clear direction of designing manifestation (either after the concept A or receive clear brief at the beginning) but designers don't know which part need more emphasis and which ingredients to include. It is more suitable for **bigger digital campaigns** because it takes more time and efforts.

## PURPOSE

1. Use well-developed moodboard to help with actual design phase in an organised way.
2. Find out which part of the information need to be emphasised in manifestation.
3. It can be used right after concept A and can contribute to concept C.
4. Build rationale behind manifestations.



### Self-reflections

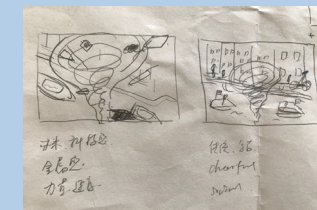
" Almost all design proceeds by transforming, combining and adapting elements of previous designs, as well as elements and aspects of other objects, images and phenomena. "(Eckert, et al, 2000) Different elements form a manifestation, It's important to know what to include and what to emphasise. By looking at other inspiration management softwares, research and my experience, I categorize them into four "main manifestation elements". But it still need a lot of validation tests to see if they can work as my expectation. I only conducted 4 validation tests and that's not quite enough.



### Validation tests

According to the online tests, one element that hasn't been included in this method, but is important in manifestation design, is the **composition**. However, in offline test, I found that **if designer draw a simple draft in step 1 could not only solve this problem but also help following design.**

When I asked the participant to list things that he is uncertain about before translating the story into the manifestation. Drawing helped not only with his thinking process but also our communication. In pictures shown below, there are two different compositions he thought of.



The main component of the left one is the tornado, the extra component is the futuristic cruises, tornado crushed cruises (stand for high-tech) which show the feeling of the destructive innovation. While the right one is mainly focused on "lovely scene of Amsterdam in Spring" and people on the river bank curiously look at the small tornado (extra components) in the canvas. **So in this case, he is clear about components so we use the method to validate what colour tone and brand values ("innovative" or "be different") to choose.**

# Brand reflection

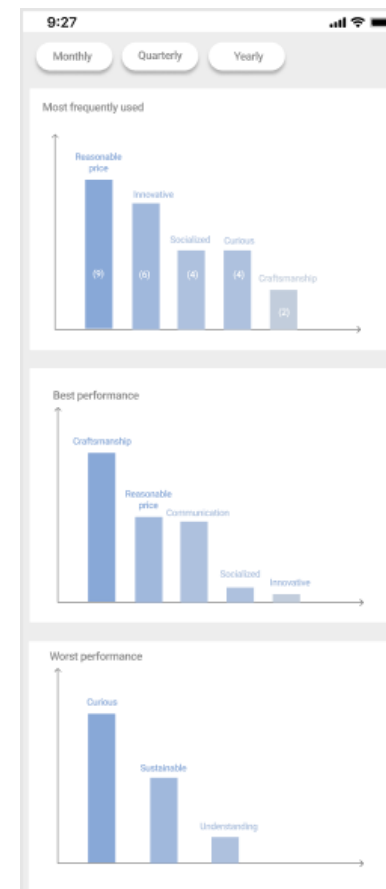
## The Next Step towards Digital Analysis and Collection



### HOW IT WORKS

With concepts above, the final manifestation will have a story(or scripts) behind and a series of tags(like "socialized" or "craftsmanship"), so if manager collect all manifestations on month or quarter basis, it could be quite obvious that which brand values/personalities/characteristics are frequently used and how's the performance(like the number of "like") of them. For example, if "craftsmanship" is often used and always receive a positive feedback, other marketing channel could pay more attention to it. Nowadays, consumers(or target audience for B2B brands) are able to co-create brand meaning. With the characteristics of social media, quick reaction and highly interactive, it should be a great channel to test, like what values are the most relevant to target audience and so on.

But it can only be done with the digitalized version of concept B. Actually, that's the starting point of making those prototypes. I'll put some prototypes down here to illustrate how it functions.



\*A possibility of how this method function

### BACKGROUND

Brand manager in internal department is responsible for the performance analysis of digital marketing. Currently, they mostly rely on the data feedback from social media platform. But when the feedback is negative, it's difficult for manager to locate where problems come from, is it because of the text?or visuals? Which part of the visuals? Apart from that, brand identity is not permanent and the brand meaning is affected by influencers, target audience, company and culture, so it would be nice to give managers a tool to reflect and adjust the brand.

### TARGETS

Brand managers

### APPLICABLE STAGE(S)

Monthly or quarterly reflection of work and even of the brand itself.

### PURPOSE

1. Reflect the brand and adjust.
2. Keep competitive.
3. Identify problems and advantages through data.



#### Validation tests

Although all participants thought this concept is meaningful and will help with brand reflection and co-creating brand values, some doubts about feasibility were proposed. And the "Best performance" need to more detailed definition. However, data collection and analysis of social media posts were beyond my research. Future research related to this direction will be elaborated in Discussion part.

# CHAPTER 6 | DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

## In this chapter

- 6.1 Contributions
- 6.2 Limitations
- 6.3 Recommendations for future research

6.1 |

## Contributions

### FOR PRACTICE

#### *Three standards for brand manifestations*

Currently, a clear standards to define what is a good manifestation, for the purpose of digital marketing, is missing. In internal branding department, designers usually depend on the brand manager to evaluate the quality of the manifestation and spend a lot of time on scheduling meetings or communication. This thesis summarized three standards for brand manifestations through research so that designers are able to self-evaluate their design and always bear them in mind.

#### *Identify problems and create a new workflow*

After researching the current journey of brand managers and designers in internal branding department, common problems and root causes were identified. All of them should be helpful for both designers and brand manager to reflect their current way of working and consider the new smooth workflow introduced in this thesis.

#### *Collaborate with non-design background people*

First of all, it is very important to keep in mind that various positions make the considerations of designers and brand managers/clients different. For example, brand manager focus more on the overall branding strategy than if the visual look pretty. The new workflow introduced here considered about needs of different stakeholders, not just stand on the position of designers.

Secondly, visuals help but it's also important to use texts in the process. On the one hand, it cost less time than making drafts or mood board, on the other hand, verbal stimuli can also contributes to creativity activities, for instance, searching for inspirations.

### FOR ACADEMY

#### *Brand manifestation - showcase unique Characteristics of social media*

There is little literature about how brand manifestations are made for the purpose of digital marketing(especially for social media marketing). During research and concept validation phases, a few standards of brand manifestation were defined and the new opportunities appear considering the unique characteristics of digital platforms like social media. For example, it allows interaction between brands and users and it can easily identify trivial trends that happen in society(like hashtag "stayathome" on Instagram).

#### *Communicating feelings*

To make intangible feelings easier to communicate among stakeholders, an efficient way is to combine it with a certain context. No matter in visuals or in texts, it will eliminate misunderstandings to a large extent. For example, people may have countless associations about "Joyful Christmas", but if we put it into a story like "families exchange Christmas gifts around table happily", the feeling, atmosphere and the whole theme suddenly become clearer, for those who have better imaginations, a scene probably has come into views. So it's important to set a frame first before conveying values, feelings, atmosphere, brand personality, etc.

## Limitations

### CRITICAL REFLECTION ON CONTENT

#### *Execution*

Change management is a systematic approach for organizations to manage the complexity of organizational change (Kotter, 2006). Given that some big brands have multi-hierarchies within branding department (several managers/directors) and my method needs high involvement of brand manager(s), there's a possibility of resistance during implementation. A more detailed change management plan might be needed (Kotter's widely known change management framework can be used as a reference). Besides, the method performance within the design team (several designers) has not been tested, it's also one of the uncertainty factors in execution.

#### *Involve target audience*

Currently, target audience involvement is low in both internal branding departments and agencies. Interviewees gave two explanations, on the one hand, brand managers/clients have the final say and they can represent target audience because they "know what the target audience needs", on the other hand, designers don't have much time (or have no time) and budget to involve target audience when designing manifestations for digital platforms. However, all of them agree it's important to engage them into the process.

In the new workflow introduced in the thesis, the target audience can only be involved if there's a digital version of this method. For example, they just need to spend 1-2 minutes making choices in validation moodboard through a link sent by designers rather than playing around pictures and posters with designers for half an hour in the office. So the goal of involving the target audience can't be achieved in a short time in this workflow.

### CRITICAL REFLECTION ON PROCESS

#### *Method*

The research method itself has certain limitations, which is inevitable in the study. As Strauss and Corbin advised, at least 10 interviews with detailed coding are necessary for building a grounded theory (Saldaña, 2012). The method used in this thesis is only a simplified version of grounded theory experience since only six interviews were conducted so conclusions drawn from participants' experiences are probably not so representative. Another inevitable drawback of this method is that the huge data generated by it is neither easy to manage nor for others to review. However, this is a property of qualitative research, and I have taken several actions to reduce such contingency. For example, I wrote a memo during the interview and data analysis phase to remind myself of interesting insights and possible connection of findings. And to help other people review my research, I also made a Codebook in the APPENDIX. And to make up for the number of participants, a session was supplemented.

#### *User involvement in validation phase*

The number of participants for validation test is insufficient. The method was expected to embrace the diversity of brand's digital marketing needs, however, I've only validated it within the context of promotion and activity notification. Each validation session revealed new insights, implying that the saturation point has not been reached.

Apart from that, I haven't got the chance to validate the concepts with brand manager in the internal branding department and that may lower the validity and quality of the proposed outcomes.

## Recommendations for future research

### HOW DO ELEMENTS BUILD UP THE MANIFESTATIONS?

Concept B in this thesis introduced four key elements of brand manifestations. But there are much more elements in the manifestation, for example, during validation phase composition of manifestation is stressed by a participant.

Eckert, C., & Stacey, M. mentioned that almost all design proceeds by transforming, combining and adapting elements of previous designs, as well as elements and aspects of other objects, images and phenomena. The way elements come together is how creativity functions. So it should be an interesting direction to research further. In page 27, how designers utilize elements in design process is simply introduced. But the inner interactions among those elements were not explored.

### TOOL DEVELOPMENT FOR BRANDING AGENCIES

In page 23, the similarities of brand manifestation design in the internal branding department and agencies were listed. Because of the similar design process & tools and considerations, they also share some worries, such as, insufficient references and communicating with non-designers. However, if look closely, there are more fine-sorted tasks in the agency, even among agencies (leading agency and local agency), which makes the communication between stakeholders particularly complex and time-consuming.

Some insights has already been identified in this thesis and the APPENDIX, and a specific process of designing social media manifestations is made. Future research of enhancing brand manifestation design in the agency is suggested to start with the aforementioned points.

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