SME BRAND DESIGN IN GHANA: THE ARTIST PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the most important visual elements brand design artists should consider when creating visual communication tools, branding situation among SMEs in Ghana, and the most important visual communication tools that should be emphasized on in Ghana from the artist perspective. Visual communication tools highlighted for this study due to their relevance and prevalent use by SMEs include logo, signage, market collateral, product packages, apparel and stationary while visual elements considered for the study are key color, consistency of images, symbolism of design, medium, and typography & treatment. To attain the research objective, researcher used a pair-wise structured questionnaire to solicit data from artist and used analytical hierarchy process; AHP methodology to analyse and evaluate data obtained. The research proposes for each visual communication tool hierarchically, the most important visual elements that should be considered in the brand design process which can ultimately serve as a guide to other artists and organisations with their brand design.

Keywords: Brand management, Brand image/identity, Brand design, Small – Medium size Enterprise, Visual art.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, there exist immense contribution from Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to the national growth of economies. Germany, United Kingdom to mention a few are well known to have an SME engine for growth and development. All throughout the world SMEs have been proven to be a significant economic wheel of development either from the perspective of a developing country or a developed country.

SMEs are the backbone of the Ghanaian economy as study shows they constitute 85% of businesses, greatly within the private sector, and on the other hand contributes about 70% of Ghana's gross domestic product (GDP) (Jansen M., Twum-Akwaboah S., 2016). SMEs are an integral part of the Ghanaian economy as they tend to employ the vulnerable groups of society including women, the youth, and low-skilled workers. These groups of people operate in a labor intensive, low value added sectors but wages tend to be low. Notwithstanding this, the importance of SMEs cannot be underemphasized in Ghana thus the need to consider various aspects of brand design to be precise as SME branding is in its infant stage. Actions to boost SME competitiveness through improving basic branding activities such visual communication tools (logo, signage, etc.) with conscious knowledge of the required visual element can help their consumer appeal, ultimately increasing wages and standard of living. The influence of good brand design on consumer decisions is immeasurable and for this reason building a good brand design in SMEs is imperative and do not only increase credibility but more importantly visibility. According to a study by Alliance for Action in (2016), less than 24% of SME firms engaged in any type of advertising (branding) hitherto

2015 fiscal year, compared to 76% of large sized firms, potentially also limiting the growth of their client base. An important dimension in SME brand design is the role of the artist. The artist considers all visual elements of an enterprise and then successfully creates an image that will principally focus on distinguishing from competitors and also give the brand a great market appeal. While big corporations or prestige brands are increasingly ready to put their identity in the hands of renowned or professional artists and designers in order to appear avant-garde and elitist (Kapferer, 2014; Lee, Chen, & Wang, 2015; Thomas, 2007) only a hand full SMEs pay for the service of professional artist. Looking at the versatility of the visual arts, this paper examines the essential connections between the world of art and the spheres of business and marketing precisely SME brand design. The technical skills of the artist is important in brand design and in this study, there will be a closer look at the artist perspective on the most important visual elements (key colours, typography and treatment, consistency of images, symbolism of design and medium) to be considered when making visual communication tools for SMEs in Ghana. This study is also done to understand the brand design situation of the Ghanaian SME brands. This will to some extent provide stakeholders' insights on brand design practices that can be readily incorporated in SMEs to be more competitive.

LITERATURE REVIEW
SME Brand Management
The definition of SMEs by the European Commission, considers determining factors such as the number of employees and either turnover or balance sheet total. Mid-sized; if the number of employees is inferior to 250 and the turnover less than €50m and Small size less than 50 employees and a turnover not superior to €10m. In Ghana, most SME are not registered and as such there is lack of adequate data to well categorize and defined the state of SME. The sense of SME brand management is almost nonexistent as brand image/identity activities are considered unnecessary and not equally important. Generally, Brand Management in SMEs is at a low level of consciousness for most new entrepreneurs and even existing SMEs businesses (Merrilees, 2007). Although there is a lot of research done in relation to SMEs, it brand management has been overlooked greatly (Roy and Banerjee, 2012; Asamoah, 2014). According to Keller (2003) SMEs should focus on using a well-integrated mix of brand elements that support both brand awareness and brand image and this paper intends to discuss the elements that will enable SMEs to be competitive in Ghana.

SME Brand Image/Identity
Hitherto, research has probed and investigated the importance of brand identity/image and perceptions of quality in consumer assessment of brands (Bhat and Reddy, 2001). To create brand equity, it is important to develop a brand identity (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2003) which should be guided by the brand concept of the organization and that sustaining this connection should potentially enable the market appeal of that brand. Aaker (1996) regards brand identity as "what the organization wants the brand to stand for in the customer's mind". It can be deduced that, brand identity is a neutral source of brand positioning used to convey intent although there exist a plethora of products, programs, and initiatives. Kapferer (2008). Scholars indicated there is a clear distinction between a company's identity and image Chernatony (2010). Kotler and Keller (2011) explain that "Identity is the way a company aims to identify or position itself or its product while Image is the way the public actually perceives them. The onus lies on SMEs to purposefully create a brand identity that will in print on the minds of its target consumers using the appropriate brand identity elements. To create a good image in the minds of consumers, the artist together with the marketer must create and convey brand identity through every available communication vehicle and brand

contact. The dexterity of artists is employable in creating brand identities for SME. Artists work such as ads, brochures, catalogs, packaging, and business card must be disseminated and expressed in the right symbols, colors and slogans, atmosphere, events, and employee behavior. This study will present a guide that will help new, upcoming SME entrepreneurs and artists alike to know important factors to consider when making the various brands visual communication tools elements such as signage, logos etc. to purposefully and appropriately position themselves in the minds of consumer.

Brand Design

Art surrounds us in all that we do, thus Art is life. Every form of art must go through a design process for the art form intended to achieve its purpose. Design according to Healy (2009), does not only consist only visual elements, it is how art forms are crafted. This means there is the need for precision, layout of visual elements of key colors, typography and treatment, symbolism of design, consistency of images in the design and the medium. The aforementioned visual elements has to be connected to present a substantial brand design. Visual elements can be seen in all facets of brand as it differentiates between symbols and brands. (Healy 2009). Brand design contains processes that determine the corporate or SME identity and will also include visual communication tools such as logo, signage, product packaging, marketing collateral, stationary and apparel. It helps to create in customer's minds associations of visual elements which are well positioned within each visual communication tool. In Ghana markets are overwhelmed with different kinds of visual communication tools but do not achieve its desired impact. According to Hammonds, (2008), the key to a successful brand design is consequence and an onus lie on organizations to be well informed and engaged artists to create visual communication tools that informs customers, partners and society (Kotler's 2007). For SMEs, it is important to know which visual communication tool to use generally and the most important visual element that needs to be considered. Hammonds (2008) suggests companies engage professional agencies for developing their brands' visual elements although it might be too pricy. However, small businesses might just need the precise visual communication tool but must be consistent with the enterprise values, principles and actions (Hammonds 2008).

The Role of Artist In Brand Design

The role of artists in our daily life is evident in everything we see and use and with concise regard to business brand design; artists through art may also be able to be part of aesthetic product design, thus helping attract consumers and convey favorable impressions of a product or brand (Kreuzbuer and Malter, 2005). Around the world today, most customers have their basic needs fulfilled and as such large and SMEs regardless of their business activity can capitalize the aesthetic prowers of the artist possess to create brand identities to still have consumers appeal or be competitive. The concept of aesthetics in brand design and marketing implies activities by artists that promote or illicit sensory experiences with regards to an organizations brand identity. The aesthetics in marketing, as opposed to other fields, bothers on the structural and referential qualities of the aesthetics of an organization or brand that are working together. The aesthetic feature the artist may create on a brand ultimately differentiates and the success of various organizations in our modern SME entrepreneurial boom is not only due to the quality of products or services but also aesthetics. Research over the years emphasized the importance of a conceptual fit with the brand itself, rather than focusing one-sidedly on product-level feature similarities (Park, Milberg, and Lawson, 1991). Further, Burke et al expressed that to maximize extendibility, brand should attempt to enhance the value of characteristics associated with brands name such as style, quality etc. that are not product-specific. Brand aesthetics encapsulates logos, websites, signage, exterior

and interior design, show windows, floor, lighting etc. and successful brands prioritise these rather than less successful companies. Worth to mention that Kreuzbauer and Malter (2015) argue that brand design can be utilized as a tool to help evolve consumer perceptions on a brand. From the aforementioned the skills set of the artist is equally important as the identity the artist creates benefits both the company and the brand. In the same vain, visual art infusion theory (Hagtvedt and Patrick, in Press) explains the spillover effect of art on consumer evaluations of products. These authors demonstrate that perceptions of excellence of a professional artists spill over from the art onto the product giving it a greater appeal.

The aesthetics the artist creates for brands is a powerful source for the impressions and reactions that consumers will have on SMEs brand with the intent to gain and retain clients. Henrik Hagtvedt and Vanessa M. Patrick (2008), in their study suggested that in general, the presence of art causes both brand image and brand extensions to be evaluated more favorably. SME brand identity management must be key to the internal and external functions of art specialists such as graphic designers in SMEs. This current research is a first attempt to systematically assess and enumerate the influence and artist perspective on important factors with special regard to SME brand design in Ghana of which it outcomes can be applicable to various fields. Although previous research does not investigate how artists/art integration influences the perception on SME brand, it appears logical that well-crafted brand design would to a large extent contribute to the brand image and appeal of enterprises.

METHODOLOGY
Sample and Sampling Method
This study used the purposive and snowballing sampling method. Researcher obtained data from individuals who are educated in art schools and art departments of major well known universities in Ghana. They ranged widely in age, but the average age was between 25 and 35; about 56% were women and 44% men. Their qualification ranged between Postgraduate and Higher national diploma; with about 70% first degree, 25% postgraduate and 5% HND. Their art specializations spans brands consultant, graphic design and print media solutions. The average years of experience branding SME in Ghana by the sample art professionals is six (6) to ten (10) years. Thirty (30) professional artists were purposively sampled to represent the large art community. The researcher easily had access to a lot of artists due to his personal professional background in art education, thus, experienced colleagues participated in the survey who intern also snowballed by recommending industry comrades to participate in the study. The study submitted two rounds of questionnaires to respondents of which the first round of questions was to gather quantitative data on the SME brand design situation in Ghana. Respondents were required to select their choice from multichoice such as "which brand identity image element should be emphasized in Ghana?", How important is it that SMEs have marketing collateral?". And the second questionnaire obtained qualitative data on the most important criteria to consider when designing visual brand communication tools such as logo, signages etc. by participants doing a pairwise comparison.

Statistical package of social science (SPSS)
SPSS data analysis tool is used to analyze quantitative data with descriptive analysis on the present situation on SME branding identity in Ghana. Finally, the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) is used to prioritize the criteria for the designing of the most important brand visual communication tools.

AHP Methodology

AHP is a measurement theory (Satty 1980, 1982, 1986) that attempts to describe a general decision operation by decomposing a complex problem into a hierarchical multi-level structure. The AHP methodology has been used successfully in various fields and this study also furthered its application in prioritizing the design components of the most important brand visual communication tool for SMEs in Ghana. The hierarchy of our decision problem has the structure of (i) the objective which is to select the most important brand design features; (ii) the criteria are: key colors, typography and treatment, symbolism of design, consistency of images and medium; (iii) alternatives are brand identity elements: logo, signage, stationary, marketing collateral, products packaging and apparel. Artists express their preferences as a pairwise comparison matrix using integers 1,2,3,4,5 and their reciprocals between the criteria and alternatives. Figure 1 shows the AHP structure for the study and table 1 details common comparison scale for AHP method that is used for this research.

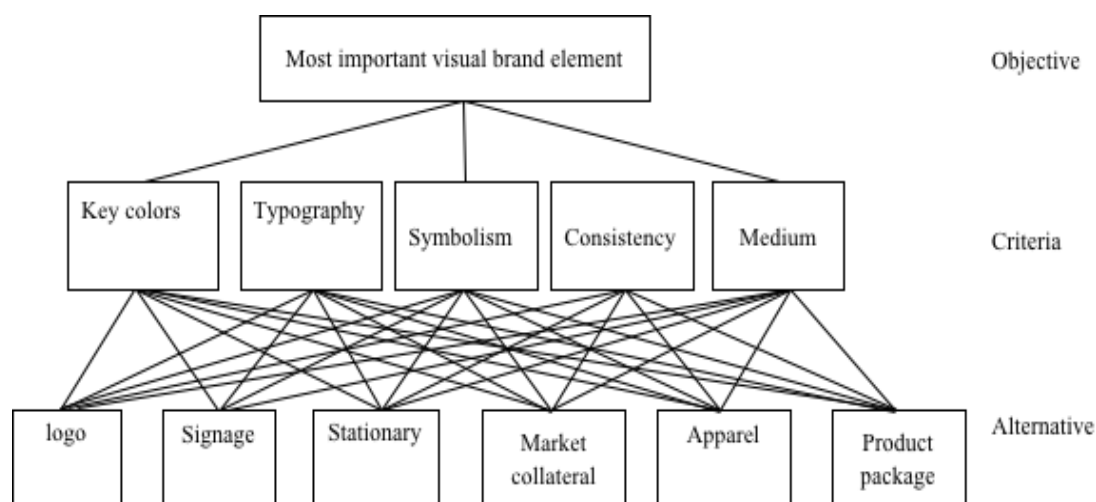**Figure 1 AHP Structure for the study**

Table 1 Common comparison scale for AHP method

Intensity of importance	Definition	Explanation
1	Equal importance	Two factors contribute equally to the objective
3	Somewhat more important	Experience and judgment slightly favor one over the other
5	Much more important	Experience and judgment strongly favor one over the other
2, 4,	Intermediate values	When compromise is needed

After the pair wise comparison is done, the researcher calculated the product using the formula

$$M = \prod a$$

Calculate the root of the product and normalization to get appropriate weight $\overline{W_i}$

$$\overline{W_i} = W_i / \sum_{1}^{n} W_i$$

Calculating the consistency ration

$$CR = {CI}/{CR}$$

The consistency Ratio (CR) informed the researcher on how consistent the artists are when making the pairwise comparisons. If the consistency ratio (CR) is less or equal (≤) to 0.1, then it means calculations are consistent, on the other hand if it is greater than (>) 0.1 then serious reconsideration needs to be done. This research after the pair wise and consistency ratio calculations on used

comparisons with CR below or equal to 0.1 and is presented in the final weights in tables subsequently.
The same AHP calculation process was applied to all pair-wise comparisons received from artist but only comparisons with consistency ratio of less or equal ($\leq$) to 0.1 was considered for the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher present first the main findings of the SME brand design situation in Ghana using SPSS and secondly, AHP to find out the most important features when creating brand elements.

Sme Branding Situation In Ghana

As expected, participants agreed that there are enough professional artists who can help improve the brand design of SMEs in Ghana. It also came to light that all participants have branded SMEs and on average charge between 500 Ghana cedis and 750 Ghana cedis. Although participants indicated they are usually contracted to work on all the highlighted brand visual communication tools of the study, majority of them agreed they are often specifically paid to work on marketing collaterals. Overall, the SME brand image was described as fair and the reason for this is attributed to, largely, the lack of creativity and poor concept; typical reference to blue as the colour mostly used in SME brand design in Ghana. More importantly, the study revealed that, comparatively, marketing collateral is extremely important brand visual communication tool and must be emphasized in SME branding in Ghana. On the other hand, logos, signages and product packaging respectively also showed some importance. The least important element from the study is stationary and apparel design with participants indicating insignificant importance.

Selecting the most important criteria when designing brands visual communication tools using AHP

Overall, 55 pairwise comparisons were conducted by artists and the final weight for each feature corresponding to visual communication tool is presented. The most important features to be emphasized when creating the various brand elements and the final results of its relative weight importance is provided in the tables below. The results presented in Table 2 clearly distinguishes and prioritize features that will serve as a guide to artist employed to work on brand design of SMEs in Ghana and around the world. It highlights the most important feature when artist attempts to create any brand design. The study showed that, when making logo, the most important feature to pay attention to is symbolism of the design being worked on. It also showed medium used or to be used is very important while the typography and treatment, that is text is an important factor. However consistency of images and key colors are slightly important and may not need much attention when making logos. The results of the analysis also further revealed that when making signages and stationary for SMEs in the context of Ghana the most important feature is medium on which or with which the signage or stationary is made while the least important is the consistency of image and symbolism respectively. The researcher found out in making marketing collateral, the key feature that needs to be emphasized is medium. Also, typography and treatment is very important with key colors being the least important feature. Lastly, typography and treatment is the most important and key colors being the least important with reference to making SME apparel.

Table 2: Final weight of important feature
when making logo

BRAND ELEMENT FEATURES	WEIGHT (W*i*)	IMPORTANCE
Key colors	13.07	slightly important
Typography and treatment	14.78	Important
Symbolism of design	35.54	Most important
Consistency of image	13.23	slightly important
Medium	23.38	Very important
Total of all weights	100	

Table 3: Final weight of important feature
when making signage

BRAND ELEMENT FEATURES	WEIGHT (W*i*)	IMPORTANCE
Key colors	15.69	slightly important
Typography and treatment	22.07	Very important
Symbolism of design	18.24	Important
Consistency of image	15.01	slightly important
Medium	28.99	Most important
Total of all weights	100	

Table 4: Final weight of important feature
When making stationary

BRAND ELEMENT FEATURES	WEIGHT (W*i*)	IMPORTANCE
Key colors	9.84	slightly important
Typography and treatment	21.91	Very important
Symbolism of design	9.67	Slightly important
Consistency of image	19.77	Important
Medium	38.82	Most important
Total of all weights	100	

Table 5: Final weight of important feature
when making market collateral

BRAND ELEMENT FEATURES	WEIGHT (W*i*)	IMPORTANCE
Key colors	11.98	Least important
Typography and treatment	25.15	Very important
Symbolism of design	14.14	Slightly important
Consistency of image	22.24	Important
Medium	26.50	Most important
Total of all weights	100	

Table 6: Final weight of important feature
When designing apparel

BRAND ELEMENT FEATURES	WEIGHT (W*i*)	IMPORTANCE
Key colors	7.87	Least important
Typography and treatment	33.37	Most important
Symbolism of design	23.34	Very important
Consistency of image	15.32	Slightly important
Medium	20.10	Important
Total of all weights	100	

Table 7: Final weight of important feature
when designing product packages

BRAND ELEMENT FEATURES	WEIGHT (W*i*)	IMPORTANCE
key colors	21.13	Very important
typography and treatment	26.85	Most important
symbolism of design	13.93	Slightly Important
consistency of image	16.54	Important
medium	21.55	Very important
Total of all weights	100	

While the results provided in Tables 2, 3, 4, 5 offer interesting and useful information, the main goal of the AHP evaluation was to determine the most important features when making each brand elements/ visual communication tools for SMEs in Ghana essentially as a guide for both artists and SMEs to be able to make their brand image appealing. The average of final resulting weights for each features of the alternative brand element is calculated and it revealed that, over all, when making all brand elements, the most important features to consider in order of hierarchy and need much attention is medium (27.7%), typography and treatment (23.6%), symbolism of design (19.8%), consistency of images (16.8%) and key colors (11.3%). Results clearly and distinctively outline in hierarchy important features for each brand element necessary for SME brands and Managers of SME can prevent brand design or image failure by actively involving and engaging with artists to create brand visual communication tools that will help their SMEs to have good market appeal. As established in the quantitative analysis, the most important visual communication brand elements that should be emphasized on due to the structural nature of the Ghanaian market is marketing collateral, logos, product packages and signage respectively. As such, Managers should

invest more in the aforementioned with its corresponding features to ensure good brand appeal to their target consumers.

CONCLUSIONS

The main aim of the project was to identify the most important visual brand elements that are key in making visual communication tools for SMEs in Ghana from the artists perspective. This study is the first of its kind based on interviews and literature review, thus, the study will serve as a foundation framework for both artists and SME managers in better dealing with brand design. The study confirms that in brand design there are key visual elements to be taken into consideration when designing visual communication tools. The data obtained was gathered from veteran artists who in a AHP suitable pair wise questionnaire indicated their opinion on the most important brand elements features to consider when making visual communication tools.

The results regarding brand design among SMEs in Ghana was consonant with literatures and interviews conducted although with few exceptions. The study showed that, symbolism, is the most important feature in logo while medium is for signages, stationary and marketing collateral. Typography and treatment is a key feature with product packages and apparel design. Contrary to the popular use of signages among SMEs in Ghana, artist emphasized that, the most important visual communication tools that should be emphasized are marketing collateral, logos, and product packages respectively taking into consideration the best visual elements. Since this research considered only the artists perspective, future study can be made based on the consumer perspective on the various visual elements that attracts them with reference to and in context of the various visual communication channel that appeals to them.

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