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How Should Contemporary Designers View Self-brand Marketing?

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Abstract

As the first designer to appear on the cover of Time magazine, industrial designer Raymond Lowey not only designed the Coldspot refrigerator and the Pennsylvania Railway but also created a personal brand and marketed his personal to help sell his products. Nowadays, in the context of the Internet age, there are a large number of designers who are marketing themselves on various platforms on the Internet and using this fame effect to sell their design products. As a matter of fact, the rise in the number of designers' personal marketing has caused some business losses and brought bad effects to the whole design industry. Young up-and-coming designers should focus on developing sustainable careers rather than risking the illusion of being a celebrity designer through self-promotion. This article will argue that self-promotion is an illusion for designers by analyzing how Raymond used self-promotion to gain popularity. Firstly, the article will compare the self-promotion methods of contemporary designers and Lowey's. Secondly, the article will show that Lowey's success is not just self-promotion; Finally, there will be some questions that young designers should pay attention to in the future.

Keywords

Designer, brand, brand marketing, Raymond Lowey, self-promotion, future designer, art, design

1. Introduction:

On October 31, 1949, Time magazine featured a designer on its cover for the first time. That man was Raymond Lowey, one of the most famous of America's first generation of industrial designers. He was not only the designer of the Coca-Cola bottle shape, Coldspot refrigerator, and the Pennsylvania railroad, but also the founder of a personal brand (Flinchum, 2019). Nowadays, with the increasing popularity of online media, a large number of designers have imitated celebrity designers and created their own brands to promote themselves in order to gain exposure and the benefits that come with it. According to Zicari's interview with software engineer David Fox (2018), Behance, a website that allows designers to create personal portfolios, has more than 10 million members, and thousands of creatives post and update new projects every day. However, it is an alarming phenomenon, Milton and Rodgers (2011) state that the cult of celebrity designers has caused some commercial damage, and young and emerging designers should focus on developing sustainable careers rather than risk creating the illusion of celebrity designers through self-promotion. What, then, should contemporary designers think about self-promotion?

To address this question, this paper will argue that the blind imitation of celebrity designers' self-brand methods will be the falsity for contemporary designers by analyzing how Raymond Lowey used self-promotion to gain popularity. Firstly, the article will compare the self-promotion methods of contemporary designers and Lowey's to illustrate the lack of corresponding conditions for the promotion channel. Secondly, the article will state that Lowey's

success is not just self-promotion but also design concept; Finally, there will be some questions that young designers should pay attention to in the future.

2. Differences between Raymond Lowey's self-promotion methods and those of designers today

Contemporary designers lack the appropriate conditions to achieve uniformity from the individual to the work. Consistency is always expected to be the norm for celebrity designers, like Raymond Lowey, whose self-promotion comes from unity from the inside out, from personal image to design taste. Porter (2003) describes that Raymond Lowey cultivated an image of himself as a European gentleman, often speaking on radio and television, which was reinforced by the way he spoke and the words he used. He maintained good relations with celebrities in politics, business, and society. Even houses, custom cars, clothes, and meals were carefully chosen to match his image (Porter, 2003). However, it is difficult for contemporary designers to establish and publicize their personal image due to their dependence on various platforms of online media. This is supported by a study that different platforms have their own specific content. For example, Pinterest is popular for pictures without personal photos, but Instagram is popular for selfies (Scolere et al., 2018).

This shows that due to the characteristics of the network platforms, the shaping of the personal image of contemporary designers is separated from the shaping of their works, and it's hard for designers to organically combine them as Raymond Lowey did. Moreover, contemporary designers struggle to maintain even the consistency of their work, as it follows.

Raymond Lowey's design is characterized by its simplicity. Nickles (2002) points out that Lowey's design style inherited the European modernism represented by Bauhaus, corresponding to the European gentleman image created by himself, and he gave up aristocratic decoration and only added beauty through materials and shapes. Whether it is the design of packaging, household appliances, or transportation, Raymond Lowey's design style is unified, but this is difficult for contemporary designers to achieve. Designers have little autonomy when it comes to the requirements of different clients, so the work they present is always stylistic (Scolere, 2019).

With the increase of communication media and the reduction of publicity costs, customers and the general public can see a huge number of designers and artists on the Internet ..... Among them, there may be designers who have their own strong personal style, but therefore also limit their audience. There is no definition of beauty and no standard for appreciating beauty, so when a style emerges, there is bound to be criticism from the audience if there is an audience for it. Broadening the audience and increasing exposure can be extremely costly, time-consuming, and expensive. Not only do designers need to constantly improve their ability to keep viewers from getting bored with the same style of image, but designers also need to maintain their style to keep from losing supporters, which is an extremely difficult balance to strike. Moreover, in order to ensure the flow of publicity, designers need to be sensitive to the current hot topics, but then it is difficult not to be influenced by the popular elements. In particular, many platforms require publishers to spend a lot of money on promotional services, and also to meet the requirements of the type of hot topics supported by the platform, which is undoubtedly a test for designers. A designer wants to set up a brand, it is inevitable to have visibility, how to jump out in the many designers for the public to see, how to promote their own works, how to meet the requirements of the party but also to maintain a personal and independent style, these are designers must think about the problem.

Zhao Xiaoli, as an internet celebrity, has gained a lot of fans and traffic with her performance art-like oil painting process, but there are also a large number of people who say that she is grandstanding—waving a lot of paint, polluting white dresses, using flowers as brushes, and breaking painting boards; artists in the industry in particular strongly disapprove of this kind of promotional behavior. This kind of showmanship to gain fans is commonplace on online platforms, and many platforms have seen similar behaviors, with the catharsis of beauty and violence becoming a traffic code to be imitated. But this kind of behavior was collectively boycotted by the art industry, because it would make the public think that art itself is like this, crazy behavior, demented minds, contrived movements, pretending to be deeply sad, inferior painting skills, and childish modeling ability. The content of her images is so similar, so uniform and so unprofessional. An artist who is only good at self-promotion but not good at the business itself is undoubtedly going to be rejected. This kind of short-term traffic is not long-lasting, as even the uneducated aesthetics of the general public will get tired of this kind of similar content output.

In contrast to Raymond Lowey's approach to self-promotion, contemporary designers do not have favorable presentation conditions, which limit their ability to promote their self-brands and prevent them from enjoying the long-term benefits of true celebrity designers. There's no denying that even short-term benefits will attract many

young designers, but does celebrity designer success really depend solely on self-promotion?

3. The fact that Loewy's success is not just about self-promotion and that contemporary designers can't just look at appearances

Loewy's success is not only by self-promotion but also by creating a new design concept. Raymond Lowey is best known for creating modernist streamlined designs. According to Milton and Rodgers (2011), streamlining is a shape, like an airfoil, that is widely used in industrial and product design to reduce air resistance. The idea became so useful in future car design that it became synonymous with America in the 1930s. However, nowadays, creating a new design style that is significant enough to influence the future is almost impossible. This is supported by a report of interviews with contemporary designers that most contemporary designers need to create their portfolios on digital platforms in order to get noticed, but these social media exposures are uncontrollable. In order to get noticed faster, designers tend to stereotype their works through the grasp of the current hot styles. Moreover, in this era of personality liberalization, the emergence of each new style is short-lived and mostly a revival of old fashion (Scolere et al., 2018). In addition, Raymond Lowey has written many professional design articles and two books on design subjects and published an autobiography in order to promote and explain his design philosophy. Porter (2003) illustrates that Raymond Lowey has been emphasizing simplicity and aesthetics, and has compiled a practical methodology for his fellow designers to refer to. If contemporary designers are consumed with self-branding, they will not have the time to delve into the future direction of design, not compile their insights into books for peer review. This is potentially a threat to the sustainability of the design profession. Instead of focusing on the superficial beauty of celebrity designers, contemporary designers should measure their ability to be consistently creative and not be blinded by self-promotion strategies.

Clothing designer Chen Caini, who became famous for his venomous reviews of celebrity outfits and attracted millions of fans, wanted to showcase his clothing brand after gaining traffic, so he tried a variety of methods—collaborating with movie stars, inviting many internet celebrities to his own clothing show, and opening his show in the Dunhuang Desert. However, it is because he is famous for his celebrity red-carpet outfit reviews that his own clothing brand is given a higher profile by the public. His current clothing show was widely discussed by other designers and the general public, but most of the comments were negative, and even Chen Caini was caught up in a plagiarism self-attestation fiasco. After this clothing show, Chen Caini's popularity is also declining. This shows that self-promotion does not necessarily help, but may also be a hindrance to achieving personal success. It is very dangerous for a designer who does not have strong skills and professional work to gain fame because of self-promotion, it may even make the whole industry think that this designer is unprofessional and needs to be excluded.

In addition, designers are essential members of the service industry, and their job is to serve others and the company, whether they are product designers, graphic designers, or media designers, they have to build relationships with others (the environment, flora, and fauna are also included in the scope of the others). Therefore, it is necessary to know and learn about other disciplines, especially ergonomics, psychology, and social sciences, as well as knowledge about the environment, sustainability, futurism, etc. If a designer spends all of his/her energy on building a false reputation, where will he/she find the time and energy to improve his/her insights?

4. How contemporary designers should consider their own careers in reference to Lowey's success

The above-mentioned should make contemporary designers cautious about self-promotion and learn from the success of Raymond Lowey what to focus on in their future careers. For sustainable career development, designers should continue to learn theoretical knowledge and design skills. Only by creating enough high-quality design works, can designers be trusted by the public and customers, have more autonomy in future design projects, and develop a personal style to fulfill the requirements of the unity of works. It could be argued that while branding and marketing are often linked, personal branding does not fall into this category, which raises “conceptual questions” and “ethical questions”. Like Loewy, the essence of fame is to value uniqueness, originality, and independence from the market (Khamis et al., 2017). Another point worth noting is that designers should guide consumer demands rather than conform to them. The design of Raymond Lowey's Coldspot refrigerator proves that he realized the importance of the female market and reminded female consumers of their psychological needs to buy products, leading them to appreciate modernist aesthetics. Gorman (2000) mentions that Raymond Lowey's work, with its high aesthetic standards of “the use of color, structural and decorative design, proportion, and balance”, leads young women to appreciate

this beauty and to believe that there is a richness behind the design aesthetic. Designers need to consider their future careers from both their own perspective and the audience's perspective, to keep design works at a high standard and achieve sustainable development of their professional career. The last point, designers should also pay attention to teamwork, the formation of a team is undoubtedly a good way to save time and effort, but how to communicate, how coordinate, and how avoid plagiarism, impersonation, and other issues also need to designers in the industry together to establish a regulatory mechanism. Designers should also be more communicative and collaborative, only the competition between designers is benign, the whole design industry will thrive, and designers will also benefit from more. Teamwork can reduce the duplication of designers' efforts and improve work efficiency, such as building a shareable library of design resources and building grassroots templates.

5. Conclusion

It can be concluded that contemporary designers should not blindly imitate the self-promotion of celebrity designers by analyzing the success of Raymond Lowey.

First, by contrasting contemporary designers with Raymond Lowe's self-promotion, the media platforms on which young and emerging designers rely lack the conditions to achieve consistent shaping. Second, self-promotion is just an appearance for celebrity designers. Their success depends more on solid design ability and excellent design work. Young and emerging designers should not only focus on the illusion of fame when they lack ability but also focus on the cultivation of ability. Finally, through the analysis of Raymond Lowey, contemporary designers should pay attention to both themselves and the audience, they should focus on the sustainable development of their career, and learn how to guide the public aesthetic.

At different times, the requirements for designers are not the same. Raymond Lowey can reinforce the impression of a reliable, elegant European gentleman through consistency of image and design style, but it is difficult for designers to meet this requirement in a contemporary era where trends change quickly and different media platforms have different characteristics. But no matter what era, the need for essence is eternal, and capable designers will always stand out. Although this is the age of online media, young and emerging designers should be cautious about self-promotion. It may bring short-term benefits, but in the long run, designers should devote most of their time and energy to further learning and completing their work. Raymond Lowey is a good example to analyze and warn contemporary designers about the worship of celebrity designers and the consideration of sustainable career development. In the future, designers will need to look back, adapt, and lead.

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