Brand Identity for New Artists in the Music Industry

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the aspects of brand identity and apply it to new artists in the music industry. The research from this study was applied to Hills & Strongholds, an aspiring alternative rock band. Designs were created for the band’s brand identity on multiple platforms that attempted to portray the band’s musical vision. A survey was conducted to determine which logo and album artwork designs were able to effectively transport the band’s genre and vision based on the audience’s perception. The results of this study can be used to develop Hills & Strongholds into a distinctive brand as a whole, and can be used by other new artists to aid them in their process of creating a brand identity for themselves.
Chapter 1: Purpose of the Study

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the aspects of brand identity and apply it to new artists in the music industry. The concept of branding comes from the need to differentiate a company from their competition. A brand involves the perceived image as a whole, and, when done effectively, branding can transform a company. A brand incorporates the use of a brand identity—the visual aspects that form only a part of the overall brand. Just like consumer markets use brand identity as a differentiator, so should musicians who are starting out in the music industry. Being a musician is not only about the music, but also about how your audience perceives you. Many bands that attempt to become “famous” overlook the importance of a brand identity and how it affects an audience’s experience with them. It is important for new musicians and bands to realize how brand identity is helpful in starting their career.

One band called Hills & Strongholds has recognized this need and is searching for help with brand identity. Hills & Strongholds is a band made up of three members: Chris Adams, Peter Duff, and Michael Judy. They participated in a band during high school and have recently decided to pick up music again and record an EP. An EP contains recorded music that contains more songs than a single, but not enough songs to be considered a full album, or LP. Now that they are taking music more seriously, and have matured both in age and talent, they want their band to look professional. The band members expressed a need for identity design because being a musician is just as much visual as it is audio. Being recognizable through their music and lyrics is not the only
important aspect of starting a band—the band states, “you should also be able to be recognized when the music is turned off.”

**Significance of the Problem**

Hills & Strongholds understands the importance of proper brand identity creation and its effect on their success; they agreed they should create an image that they can share with the world. Although the creation of a brand as a whole comes with time, the foundation of their brand will begin with their brand identity. Brand identity starts with a set of guidelines. A branding guideline states the vision for the designs and includes logo variations—what and what not to do with a logo (i.e. spacing around the logo, colors used, sizes), what fonts to use, and acceptable color palettes. These guidelines help preserve the identity of a company, which will help with being recognizable. Hills & Strongholds, as well as other brands should utilize branding to assist in the creation of a brand identity. The use of a guideline ensures their brand will be consistent no matter the visual device. Brand identity should consistently be represented through a logo, marketing collateral, band website, products, apparel, and signage.

Furthermore, the creation of logo design is an important aspect of a brand identity itself, as it will be the key visual identifier for the band. Many people think logo creation is something that happens, but what they forget is the research that should be put into the design. A logo is developed through an extensive research and design process, including interviews with the band, research on current trends in the music industry, specifically their genre, and concept sketches. The creation of a logo will identify who the band is, where they want to end up, and their genre. Lastly, not only will brand identity be
important for Hills & Strongholds, but also others in the music industry. The research
gathered through this process is significant to others because it will build a foundation for
their career. Their image, in terms of design materials, will portray a professionalism that
some amateur musicians lack, giving off the impression they are already in the major
leagues.

**Interest in the Problem**

I have always loved a great brand. Throughout my college career, I have mainly
associated branding with physical products and would enjoy learning about branding in
the music industry. It is interesting think of branding as an image for people. Creating a
brand for Hills & Strongholds will be a fun, yet challenging project for me to do because
it is unlike any other work I have done in the past. I am curious to see how much
background work and research is put in to creating the perfect brand for musicians.
Branding in the music industry is a field I am quite curious about as a potential career,
and doing this project will give me a better sense if it is something I want to pursue.
Chapter 2 : Literature Review

A Glance At the Modernization of Branding

Although many believe branding to be a fairly modern topic, the earliest signs of branding can be seen as far back as 3,000 years ago. Branding has evolved over the years and has been through many different stages. We have seen the concept of branding grow from simple logo design to the total representation embodiment of a company in many different industries. In the Twentieth Century “graphic design, advertising, and marketing stimulated [a] ‘consumer’ economy” (Landa, 2006, p. xxiii). Much of the consumer’s money went to “branded goods”. Thus, the urge to create brands for products to become recognizable and to outshine their competitors began. The goal quickly became to create “a cohesive image created by a unified, consistent, professional visual communication program”. This image was to become the “visual identity” of a company that would give them “a ‘look’, a style, an image, a personality” (Landa, 2006, p. xxiii).

In recent years, the digital communications revolution has effected how brands are changing. A brand must now consider the effects of social media such as (but not limited to) Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Rivia (n.d.), an innovation and brand consulting agency, says “the consumer’s voice has become louder and much more public” meaning they can “publish their experience of a brand and compare it with the experience of others”. Consumers can be connected to a brand even before they themselves experience it—they live vicariously through other people’s opinions and judgments to decide whether or not they want to support that brand. Yelp, for example, lets people write reviews on different restaurants, venues, retail stores, etc. These reviews
are helpful for people who are unfamiliar with an area and help them pick a destination; usually the higher rated places have the strongest brands.

**Importance of a Brand**

According to Brad Sago in an article written from Executive Update (2001), “‘Branding’ refers to the process of making a service, product, or company (or association) stand for a set of ideas in the minds of customers. When seeing an association’s name or logo, customers link thoughts and feelings toward the organization.” It seems companies decide to create a brand to create an image to the public. A successful image will not only have the target audience view the company positively, but also link the image to certain aspects the company or association wants to be known for.

Sago (2001) goes on to explain some of the benefits of branding. These benefits include the positioning of the association, a built intra-organizational congruency, a built coherent and unified image of the association, an increased acceptance of products and services, and an increase in customer loyalty. Positioning of the association is described as having consumers feel the same way about a company as the company actually views themselves. A built intra-organizational congruency is defined as the variables an association chooses to have their brand built around. These variables will have a lot to do with how things are run for those working with the company. Furthermore, a built coherent and unified image will refrain from creating a “muddy brand”. An image should focus in on the specific aspects a company wants to be associated with. These benefits lead to the increased acceptance of a company’s products. If a brand’s image and morals
are extensive enough, consumers will be more likely to open up to the thought of trying a new product or service. The result is an increase in comfort level alongside of consumer loyalty, which means they will be more likely to buy more of that company’s products in the future. With these benefits, Sago explores the positive effects of “the implementation of a well-conceived branding plan [which] offers an association a competitive advantage over direct and indirect competitors.”

The branding of an association includes variables such as brand name awareness, logo recognition, colors, slogans, and spokespeople. Examples of these aspects include “Coke Red”, the “Nike Swoosh” or the slogan that accompanies it, “Just Do It”. These companies have created timeless and iconic brands that are known throughout the world. Anthony J. Dukes (2004, p. 4) explains how these aspects help maintain the brand image. This maintained image gives some benefits to not only the association, but to the consumers as well. Consumers will be able to identify products and make decisions based on their wants and needs. A good example of this is when we call any tissue paper Kleenex, whether it is actually that brand or not. Because Kleenex is a recognizable and popular brand for tissue paper, a consumer is more likely to purchase Kleenex over any other brand. Furthermore, this example also explores the concept of consumer loyalty. If what the association is offering matches the consumer’s needs, a base of loyal customers can be started. Dukes describes that, “loyalty, by definition, makes customers less inclined to seek out alternative products.”

Likewise, according to a design firm in the UK, Design Council (n.d.), branding is the best way for associations to clearly highlight what makes what they are offering different to, and more desirable than, anyone else’s. Design Council continues to describe
that “effective branding elevates a product or organization from being just one commodity amongst many identical commodities, to become something with a unique character and promise.” In order to compete with Coca Cola, for example, Pepsi uses the slogan “For Those Who Think Young” to give themselves that unique character and promise Design Firm mentions. Over the years this slogan has been associated with various famous actors and musicians such as Britney Spears in commercials to help promote their brand. Because of this, consumers who connect with Pepsi rather than Coca Cola develop an emotional attachment to the brand. This is essentially what effective branding should be doing. Effective branding should be able to create emotional responses in these specific consumers “who choose products and services using both emotional and pragmatic judgments” (Design Council, n.d.).

In relation to the music industry, branding is a very important step for upcoming artists. Making sure an artist has the perfect brand is crucial because it will add to the audience’s first impression of the musician. The brand will help the artist become recognizable and memorable. Anna Paula from The Global Brand Appeal (2012) suggests that a well-known brand name is what will compel fans to purchase albums and come to shows. Creating an effective brand and sparking name awareness will help certain artists stand apart from the rest of the musicians who are also trying to make it.

**Creation of Logo Design**

Since the brand will be a complete representation of the company, there are important aspects to consider: “the big idea—what lies at the heart of your company,
values—what do you believe in, vision—where are you going, personality—how do you want to come across?” (Design Council).

The goal of this project is to focus on the personality of the brand, specifically the visual identity of a brand and how it will reflect the band’s “internal culture and behavior”. Although personality traits do not necessarily have to do with the “founders” of the company, this “company” will mainly be personality-driven because of the band members. The visual identity that was created for Hills & Strongholds was represented through logo design, web design, and album design. These designs incorporated one cohesive look, and were based on the look and feel of the logo.

According to Jacob Cass from Smashing Magazine (2009), “the design process must aim to make the logo recognizable, inspiring trust, admiration, loyalty, and an implied superiority.” Essentially, logos are an identification system which use different fonts, colors, and shapes to appear “strikingly different” from another logo in the same market. Cass describes good logos are ones that convey the owner’s intended message while appearing “distinctive, appropriate, practical, graphic, and simple in form”.

Cass also advises to follow a design plan that will guarantee the needs of the clients. Their process is as follows:

1) A design brief, which calls for an interview with the client to find out their wants and needs.

2) Research based on the client’s desires.

3) Reference, which will require further research on successful logos as well as current styles and trends.
4) Sketching and conceptualizing. This entails developing logo design concepts around the information and research gathered in the previous steps.

5) Reflection, which is described as taking breaks during the design process to help “ideas mature”.

6) Revisions and positioning. Here, the logo will be updated and revised as required. This is also where the designer positions themselves as someone who is taking instructions from the client or guiding the client to the best solution.

7) Presentation. This is where the best designs will be presented to the band and explanations about any design are given as needed. And lastly,

8) Delivery and support. Cass (2009) specifically says to “remember to under-promise and over-deliver” during this stage.

Since this logo will be used on different platforms, it is important to make sure the logo is versatile enough fit these different mediums, while still being memorable and aesthetically pleasing. Another aspect to consider is the type of logo. For example, depending on the bands needs, would they want a wordmark, lettermark, brandmark, or a combination of them? These features must be carefully considered during the design process.

The branding of a company is something that should not be overlooked or taken lightheartedly. More specifically, branding in the music industry is crucial to new and developing artists. As aforementioned, a band’s logo will be one of the first aspects of the band the audience will encounter, which is when they will make their first impression. The proper creation of a brand, starting with a logo, can determine the success of a company through its connections with consumers.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this research is to discover the aspects of brand identity and apply it to new artists in the music industry. Hills & Strongholds is a new pop punk band that is in the works of testing out a career in the music industry. It is important that audience members connect with Hills & Strongholds not only musically, but also graphically, in order to build a presence in the music industry. The objective of this study was to:

- Apply these brand identity aspects and effectively create a brand for Hills & Strongholds by designing multiple platforms that will communicate their musical vision.

Audience or Sample

The target audience for this study was listeners. Samples were collected for this study to determine the effectiveness of designs. The audience for this sample was at least 50 listeners, male and females, between the ages of 14-26. This sample consisted of male and females who did and did not know the members of the band personally, and had or had not heard their music before. Moreover, although it was ideal to only sample people who listen to the pop punk music and to also sample other bands of the same or different genres, the sample included listeners who were more familiar with other genres of music.

Procedure

The experimental procedure for collecting data included a correlational research. The correlational study conducted with the sample audience consisted of surveying the intended audience. The audience was asked to examine various designs on different
platforms to evaluate how effectively it communicated the band’s musical vision. In order to provide the audience a familiarity with the band’s vision, a video of teasers from the band’s upcoming EP was provided.

**Analysis**

After the survey was conducted, the results were analyzed by using graphical displays such as charts and graphs. These charts and graphs helped determine which design was the most appealing and relative to the band. Comments from the sample audience on their opinion of the designs effectiveness to communicate their musical vision were noted as well.
Chapter 4: Results

The survey was able to draw in fifty-two respondents. Each respondent evaluated various designs, specifically logo and album artwork designs. A feedback box was given to obtain information as to why they chose a specific design or to express thoughts about what was or was not working for a particular design. The most favorable logo and album artwork are shown below (Figure 1 and Figure 2).

![Figure 1. The logo survey respondents favorited.](image)

![Figure 2. The album artwork survey respondents favorited.](image)
An online survey was sent out to members of the Graphic Communication Department at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and Music Majors at Cal Poly Pomona. As aforementioned, these respondents were given a video that provided samples of Hills & Strongholds’ music. Although they were only required to watch thirty seconds of the video to obtain a feel for their musical vision, watching the full video was highly encouraged. Below are the questions asked and designs provided (shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4).

1. Which logo do you feel is the most representative of the band based on their genre and overall sound?

After watching the video, participants were asked to choose the logo they felt best represented the music. Participants were asked to choose only one design out of the four provided. Of the four choices, the participants felt the first logo connected with the music the most. The first logo generated over half the participants votes. The participants who chose the first choice liked that the logo looked “edgy” and “serious” while still being able to seem “cool” and “fun”.

![Logo designs](image)

Figure 3. Logo design choices given to participants.
2. Which album artwork do you believe represents the band and fits with the album title “Finding Home”?

After informing participants about Hills & Strongholds’ plan to name their first EP “Finding Home” and the reasoning behind it, they were asked to choose which album artwork they felt not only represented the band but also the title. Again, participants were asked to choose only one design out of the three provided. Participants favored the second album artwork, stating that the color on top of the black and white image added to the logo’s “edginess”. Other participants who also chose the second album design expressed how the having the image in black and white created a sense of mysteriousness and loneliness associated with the EP title “Finding Home” that the others did not.
Figure 4. Album artwork choices given to participants.

- A: 21%
- B: 48%
- C: 21%
Chapter 5: Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the aspects of brand identity and apply it to new artists in the music industry, specifically the band Hills & Strongholds. Since the music industry is very competitive, creating a brand is vital in differentiating themselves from their competition. Branding includes a consistent look and feel throughout different platforms. Various designs were created and used in a study in order to determine which design effectively represented the band’s musical vision. These new logo and album artwork designs incorporated different graphic elements and typography so that audience members could effectively determine which design best represented the musical vision of Hills & Strongholds. The survey revealed that the respondents preferred to incorporate an “edgy” while “fun” look rather than the more “laid back” to the brand. The design elements of the logo and album artwork were also used in a website design in order to maintain consistent branding throughout multiple platforms. Additionally, a branding guideline was created to further ensure brand consistency past this project.

In order to conduct the study that this conclusion was drawn from, research was done to ensure the creations of the designs were done properly before showing them to the public. After an interview with the band members, research on current styles and trends, and multiple revisions a survey was sent out to members of the Cal Poly San Luis Obispo Graphic Communication Department and the Cal Poly Pomona Music Department. Although the band’s target audience includes males and females between the ages of 14-26, only males and females between the ages of 17-26 were encouraged to take the survey since it was sent out to college students. Those who were willing to participate determined which designs were more preferable and relevant to the band’s
musical vision. Participants were able to view a ten-minute video, which featured a compilation of each of the songs from Hills & Strongholds’ upcoming EP. Though they were only required to watch thirty seconds, it was advised to watch the whole thing if possible. The video was done to provide interaction between the band and the participants in order to provide a better feel for the band’s personality and musical vision. This allowed for a more effective evaluation of the designs.

Exactly half the participants preferred the first logo choice, stating it felt “edgy”, “cool”, and “fun” while still maintaining a sense of seriousness. The participants also expressed that the mountain graphic, although an interesting element, felt too “laid back” for their genre and did not fit with the band’s personality. Furthermore, 48% of the participants felt the second album artwork design connect most with their musical vision and EP title of “Finding Home”. Participants who chose the second choice said having a logo in a darker color rather than black and white gave the cover an extra sense of “edginess”. The participants also stated the utilization of a black and white photo was more powerful and gave off the feelings of “mysteriousness” and “loneliness” in relation to their EP title. Additionally, by incorporating the ampersand from the logo onto the disk, the disk itself can be easily recognizable without the album cover itself. The ampersand is a different font than the text so that it can specifically stand alone and still reflect the proper amount of intensity and a high-energy vibe that the band values.

Overall, both the logo and album artwork chosen by the participants were effective in reflecting the bands values through the use of different graphical elements.

If time permitted, it would have been useful to survey audience members between the ages of 14-16, since they were not represented in this study. Since the band’s target
market also included males and females ages 14-16, it is important to obtain the opinion on everyone in the target market to acquire a proper analysis of the designs. From the results, it would be useful to create further revisions on the designs and send out a second survey to the same participants to see if it made a difference on their perceptions of the designs’ ability to reflect the band’s musical vision. Moreover, if the band decides to create a second album or EP, conducting this survey again with the new album or EP title would be valuable to ensure the band’s image and vision is remaining consistent throughout time.

The creation of a brand identity gives new artists an extra touch of professionalism as they enter the music industry. Having a professional brand identity is a crucial aspect for new artists because it adds to their audience’s first impression. As stated earlier in a reference to Anna Paula from The Global Brand Appeal (2012), a well-known brand name is what will compel fans to purchase albums and come to shows. With the Hills & Strongholds’ new brand identity, they have a better chance at being memorable and recognizable because they are now giving their audience something to process visually as well as musically.
Works Cited


Appendix A.

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Introduction

Hills & Strongholds is an alternative band derived of three band members: Chris Adams, Peter Doft, and Michael Judy. They have a vision to share their intensity and high-energy vibe through their music. This branding guideline was created to maintain the look and feel of the intense and high-energy vibe they value throughout different platforms.

Primary Marks

HILLS & STRONGHOLDS

Single Color

The primary mark as a single color also acts as the full color logo. It consists of the name of their band, an ampersand graphic, and two lines. This mark is preferred for representing the band and should be used as frequently as possible when the logo is required.
**HILLS & STRONGHOLES**

**Reversed Out**
This mark is a variant of the single-color logo, however the foreground is rendered white on a single-colored background. This mark is most useful on dark backgrounds where the color of the logo does not provide enough contrast.

**Symbol**

**Symbol Usage**
The symbol is simply the ampersand without the text and lines. It can be used when the logo becomes unreadable in small sizes or for any design that requires a simpler look. It is also used when the logo is represented elsewhere in a design. This symbol can be used in a single-color or reversed out.
Lettermark Usage

The symbol is the "H", ampersand, and "S" from the logo. It too can be used when the logo becomes unreadable in small sizes or for any design that requires a simpler look. It is also used when the logo is represented elsewhere in a design. This symbol can be used in a single-color or reversed out.

Usage

HILLS & STRONGHOLDS
0.875”

&
0.375”

H & S
0.5”

Minimum Size

For legibility reasons, the smallest acceptable size for the primary logo is seven-eighths of an inch (0.875”) wide. If a situation arises where the logo needs to be smaller, than the symbol or lettermark should be used. The smallest the symbol can be is 0.375” while the lettermark can be 0.5”.
Clear Space
To make the logo stand out, it must always have ample clear space around it. In the primary mark, the clear space should be defined by the width of the “L” in the logo in the east and west faces, and three-fourths the height of the “O” in the north and south faces. The same is applied to the symbol and lettermark.

Inappropriate Use

Relationship of Elements
The word “Strongholds” should not be placed anywhere besides the bottom of “Hills 6” as defined.

Relative Sizes
Do not scale any individual element of the logo differently as defined.

Color
Do not use more than one color.
**Distortion**
Do not warp, stretch, or distort the logo in any way.

**Font**
The logo and lettermark shall not be used in any different typeface other than the one defined.

**Stroke**
No stroke shall ever be applied to the logo.

---

**Colors**

- C 33, M 97, Y 99, K 50
- R 105, G 12, B 7
- HEX# 890C07

- C 73, M 69, Y 66, K 54
- R 81, G 50, B 51
- HEX# 833233

**Primary Color Palette**
Although the primary color used in the logo is black, any of the colors noted in the primary color palette can be used.
Secondary Color Palette
These colors are not used in the primary logo, but can be used to compliment the logo in design applications such as the website, as well as apparel and instrument designs.

Typography

Akura Popo (Regular)

Akura Popo

Akura Popo is the main serif typeface in the Hills & Strongholds identity system. It is used for display purposes and headers.
**Aleron**

Aleron is the identity’s san serif typeface used to complement both the logo and Akura Pop. It may be used for body text and whenever a sans serif is preferred.