Sacred Packaging Design

Improving brand equity by designing a sacred packaging experience

Yanick Brezet
Capita Selecta

Industrial Design Engineering
University of Twente
Enschede, The Netherlands

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In this report, the Sacred Packaging Design (SPD) approach is explained and discussed. SPD is aimed at applying Sacred Theory to packaging design to improve user experience and increase brand equity.

SPD consists of five consecutive stages: profiling, meaning, expression, ritual journey and design. The profiling stage encompasses analysing the brand and product using Kapferer's Prism and product characteristics respectively, and can be extended using moodboards and other visual expressions. The Meaning stage applies associative mapping to extract and expand meaning of the brand and product. Means to express the meaning are explored in the Expression stage. Expressions of brand meaning are mapped in three domains: feelings, senses and interactions. Then, the expressions are connected to the stages of the Ritual Journey, creating a sequence of brand expressions that form a ritual for the packaging. Finally, the information from the first four stages is used in the design stage, where the packaging is actually designed using various methods. During the design stage, the designer should refer to the Ritual Journey stage, because some changes in the ritual journey might be necessary for creating a consistent story.

The SPD approach is tested by performing two design studies: designing shampoo and conditioner packaging for Herbal Essences (representing FMCG products) and designing packaging for an Intel processor (representing consumer electronics). Both designs are established using the SPD approach, and are analysed on process and product to investigate how successful the SPD is.

For the consumer electronics product, SPD worked well. The luxurious segment for the product left a lot of freedom to create designs with many interactions, which offered opportunities for reveals and visual transformation of the package. These interactions and transformations helped tell a story and raise excitement levels while unpacking.

It was more difficult to apply SPD to the FMCG. Contrary to the consumer electronics packaging, FMCG packaging is used many times and requires efficient interactions. While efficiency and excitement are not mutually exclusive (e.g. the Axe deodorant caps are efficient and exciting), it is more difficult to create a design that will retain its excitement after multiple unpacking cycles.

In conclusion, SPD seems to have potential for consumer electronics products, and more luxurious products in general, due to the opportunities of extensive interaction, storytelling and the practical ability to spend more on packaging design. For FMCGs, efficiency of use is very important, which complicates designing extensive interactions. Also, production cost is very important for FMCG packaging. It might be possible to design more extensive rituals for FMCG brands, however, the rituals should be designed on a brand level, rather than a product level, to maintain a sufficient number of touch points with the brand.
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Part A Introduction
Introduction

Theories of Freud suggest that human decision making is primarily based on emotion, rather than ratio. Multiple experiments of Bernays and others support these theories. Most notably, Bernays’ Torches of Freedom experiment demonstrated how groups of people could be made to desire something they did not need. Belk et al. describe how society experiences secularisation of religion, and sacralisation of the secular (Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry, 1989). Sacred Theory involves the latter; designing sacred experiences in a commercial context. An example of applied Sacred Theory is the work of Matthews (2017), who designed a framework for applying sacred theory in service design. It could be valuable to apply Sacred Theory to other activities to enhance brand equity and user experience.

Successful packaging designs convey the essence of the brand (Koopmans, 2001). However, brands often fail to do so, as Koopmans points out in his book De Kracht Van Verpakking (The Power of Packaging):

“Many [packaging] designs lack a strong thematic concept, resulting into the packaging barely contributing to the communication of the brand essence. Moreover, sometimes such packaging might conflict with the actual brand values and identity, creating unwanted associations in the consumer’s minds.”

(Koopmans, 2001, Translated from Dutch)

Thus, conveying the brand essence through packaging design does not only improve the brand image; neglecting the brand in the packaging design could damage the brand image due to unwanted associations. Application of Sacred Theory in packaging design might strengthen the conveyed brand essence, which could consequently increase customer involvement and brand equity. In this report, a design approach for Sacred Packaging Design (SPD) is proposed, based on Matthews’ Sacred Service approach (2017) and conventional branding and design approaches.

Sacred Services

Matthews defines sacred experiences as:

“Non-mundane experiences that are meaningful, and highly emotional, born out of the values and relationships within a community, generated and expressed through ritual, myth and the symbolic.”

In his work, he attempts to operationalise sacred theory into a service design method to innovate in customer experience.

Sacred Packaging Design

The Sacred Services Design method cannot be applied to packaging directly due to the differences between services and packaging on aspects such as time, modes of conveying meaning and other. However, the underlying structure of the Ritual Journey could apply to packaging, by mapping the customer journey to interactions with the packaging-product combination in a way that fits the brand.

The design should fit the product and the brand. Therefore, SPD should start with an analysis of the brand and the product. Based on the conceptualisation of brand and product, the meaning of the brand and product are analysed and is iterated upon until an extensive associative map is created. These meanings are then translated to expressions in the domains of feelings, senses and interactions, which form the input of the design process. The expressions are then mapped to the ritual journey, after which the design process starts. During the design process, the designer should refer back to the ritual journey to ensure the design fits the 5 stages, and that the desired level of excitement in each stage is realised.

Part B of this report explains the SPD approach in further detail. Part C shows two packaging designs that were established using the SPD approach, and Part D evaluates the approach based on the designs and the design process.
Part B Sacred Packaging Design Approach
Introduction

The aim of SPD is to help design packaging with an emotional connection to the user by applying Sacred Theory. Roughly, the design process starts at analysing the brand and product, extracting and expanding their meaning, finding means to express the meanings, and fitting the expressions to the ritual journey. This is described in the stages shown in Figure 1. The activities carried out in SPD occur prior to the generic packaging design process, and are intended as a means of providing direction to the designer. In the following sections, the stages are explained in further detail.

Stage 1. Profiling

Brand
The brand is characterised using Kapferer's Brand Prism. Kapferer's prism is chosen for the broad range of perspectives it provides, which provide help filling the domains in the Expression stage. Moodboards, collages and other (visual) outcomes of brand research could help the designer get a feeling with the brand.

Product
The product section describes the product-to-be-packaged. It is characterised by objective descriptors such as product name, target group, market, use cases and a written product description. Images of the product could help further describe the product. However, the designer should ensure that the pictures do not include existing packaging for the product to prevent tunnel vision.

Stage 2. Meaning

In the second stage, the meaning of the brand and product are explored through associative mapping. Initially, the designer should associate based on the brand and product characteristics. Once primary associations are exploited, the designer should associate based on the primary associations to create a large network of associations. This should be repeated until no more associations are found, or the designer judges the number and quality of the associations to be sufficient. This stage should be treated as a brainstorm, i.e. no ideas are wrong, everything should be written down, to create a broad map of associations that are somehow related to the brand-product combination.

Stage 3. Expression

In this stage, the output of the previous stage is filtered to find the most useful associations and find means of expression for these associations. Three domains of expression are distinguished in this stage: feelings, senses and interactions. These expressions are translated to descriptors of experience of the user for every domain. These domains are explained in the following subsections.

Feelings
Feelings are subdivided into two categories and should answer the following questions: (1) how should the user feel themselves, and (2) how should the user feel about the product. The answers for these questions may be found in the first two stages. The main direction is generally provided by the brand, and can be fine tuned by assessing the product and aspects from the meaning stage.

Senses
This domain describes the physical sensation the user should have looking at and using the packaging. This can range between rational and functional requirements (e.g. “grippy surface” for a showering product) to emotional and brand-related aspects (e.g. “soft look” for a Dove product). In every case, visual and touch aspects should be considered. Other senses such as hearing, smell and taste should be considered if they can contribute to the user experience.

Interactions
For this domain, interactions related to the meaning stage can be described. These interactions do not have to be...
directly related to packaging, rather, they are meant as a source of inspiration for the design process and should relate to the brand and its meaning. The result should be a map of interactions which the designer can use for finding creative packaging interactions.

**Stage 4. Ritual Journey**

Matthews (2017) describes five stages of sacred experiences and connects these to a customer journey, shown in Figure 2. In this stage, a similar strategy is proposed. The customer journey is mapped to the five stages of sacred experiences. The excitement rating is the highest in the Transition stage. This stage is used to map interactions and touch points to the stages of sacred experience, and provides directions to designing the customer journey. In Matthews’ work, individual phases of the ritual journey are extensive and explicit, due to the longer timespan of the experience. In the case of packaging design, the timespan of the experience is short. The timespan may however extend beyond the unpackaging experience, since the ritual journey should be an integrative brand experience covering the entire time of using the product.

**Evaluation Plan**

The design approach will be assessed for suitability and effectiveness through two qualitative design cases. The process will be performed for an FMCG and a consumer electronics product. The design and the design process will be evaluated, limitations will be discussed and improvements will be suggested. The designs are presented in Part C of this report, and the design and process are evaluated in Part D of this report.

**Stage 5. Packaging Design**

The first four stages should provide a number of guiding aspects on experiential and physical aspects of the design, and provide a general sense of direction to the designer. With this input in mind, the designer can work on the structural and graphic design of the packaging. The general packaging design process steps should not be forgotten; SPD should be viewed as an addition to the process to enable design for sacred packaging experience. Obviously, the designer should refer to the earlier stages during packaging design to ensure that the design remains in the right direction.
Part C  Case Studies
Cucumber and Green Tea

STAGE 1. PROFILING

**BRAND KAPFERER’S PRISM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physique</th>
<th>Personality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soft, natural, feminine, crafts, creative, vibrant pastel</td>
<td>Close to nature, bohemian heritage, young, joyful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspirational, stimulating, moments of joy and letting go</td>
<td>Close to nature, pureness, peace, calm, happiness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflection</th>
<th>Self-image</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clean, natural beauty, authentic</td>
<td>Authentic, natural, young, true sense of self</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PRODUCT CHARACTERISTICS**

**Name** Herbal Essences Cucumber & Green Tea Shampoo & Conditioner

**Target group:** Natural-looking and free young women

**Market:** Shampoo market

**Description:** Herbal Essences bio:renew is crafted with a blend of essential antioxidant, aloe and sea kelp. This shampoo has 0% parabens, silicones, gluten and colourants. Herbal Essences bio:renew brings your hair back to life. Cucumber & Green Tea Shampoo helps enhance hair shine. This shampoo is pH balanced and safe for colour treated hair. Experience the multi-layered scents of green leaves, water lily and clean amber.
Note: some mapping nodes are colour-coded to signify the connection between associations from stage 2 and expressions of stage 3.
STAGE 4. RITUAL JOURNEY

DESIGN RITUAL JOURNEY
CUSTOMER JOURNEY x SACRED THEORY

Buying the product
Anticipation

Separating yourself
starting to shower

Washing your hair

Drying up,
dressing

Daily life,
feeling fresh
and relaxed

Before
Separation
Transition
Reincorporation
After

STAGE 5. DESIGN

PACKAGING DESIGN
VARIOUS METHODS

Before

Separation

Transition

Reincorporation

After

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About the concept

Many companies come up with creative ways to minimise packaging material use for shampoos, e.g. through using solid shampoo bars (Balade En Provence, n.d.), or by selling the active ingredients to which the user adds water to at home (Bruijn, n.d.). Each one of these initiatives reduces packaging waste significantly, yet these trends are thusfar not picked up by multinational corporations, perhaps because their customer base does not want to give up on liquid shampoos.

This concept merges the sustainability advantages of solid shampoos with the convenience and appearance of liquid shampoo. The bottles are bought only once, and when they are empty, they can be refilled at home through the refill packages. The bottles are filled for 20% with the refill powders, and tap water is added to turn the product into a liquid. This reduces plastic usage significantly, compared to conventional shampoo bottles.

The visual appearance resembles existing Herbal Essences designs, especially in the shape of the bottle. The material choice and graphic design highlight an approach aimed at emphasising sustainability. Herbal Essences’ proposition on packaging design:

“Packaging as items of beauty for her and the earth”

is met with this design; aesthetics and sustainability come together. Incorporating sacred aspects into the packaging was limited to its shape and closure, since it was difficult to use only the packaging to tell a story. The customer journey could probably benefit from other marketing efforts, but that is out of scope for this research.

Technical details

Materials: post-consumer plastic (bottles), cork (bar top), unbleached PLA-lined paper (refill sachets)
Dimensions: 60x34x120 mm (shampoo), 40x40x120 mm (conditioner)
Manufacturing method: Injection blow moulding
Labeling: Clear in-mould label (bottles), 3-colour offset print (refill sachets)
### STAGE 1. PROFILING

#### BRAND

- **KAPFERER'S PRISM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physique</th>
<th>Top notch quality, high-tech, exclusivity for the masses, future-oriented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>Risk-taker, front runner, results-oriented, responsible, innovator, enabler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Silicon Valley, CA, USA international, inclusive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Broad customer base, worldwide standard, quality-oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-image</td>
<td>Powerful, confident, intelligent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### PRODUCT CHARACTERISTICS

- **Name**: Intel Core i9 9900 X processor
- **Target group**: PC-builders
- **Market**: Consumer & enthusiast grade pc-component market
- **Use cases**: Gaming, high-workload productivity
- **Description**: The Intel Core i9 9900 X is a high-quality computer processor capable of running the most recent games in high quality, and effortlessly running processor-heavy software such as CAD-applications, video editing, etc.
Note: some mapping nodes are colour-coded to signify the connection between associations from stage 2 and expressions of stage 3.
About the concept

For the past decade, consumer electronics brands are increasingly packaging their products in luxurious, high-end looking packaging. For this concept, the aim was to see whether a more pragmatic product could attain an air of luxury and mystique similar to those of mobile devices.

The high value and top-notch quality of the product justifies an exquisite and luxurious packaging design. This created opportunities for layering and including elements of reveal. Not only do these elements generate additional moments of interaction (which is desirable for this kind of packaging), they also create possibilities of interactive storytelling. In this concept, the packaging provides the user with the next step to open the doors to their new product, one step at a time.

The freedom of the product type made it easier to fit the packaging to the ritual journey. The packaging could cover a broader range of the total ritual journey, compared to the the Herbal Essences concept. This indicates that the Intel packaging design could convey a story through its packaging alone, whereas the Herbal Essences design required other marketing efforts to convey its story.
Technical details

Materials: wrapped solid board (box structure), black folding boxboard (sleeve & manual container)
Dimensions: 120x120x40 mm
Manufacturing method: Solid board wrapping (box structure), die cutting (folding box board components)
Labeling: 4-colour offset print, white and black paper
Part D Evaluation and Conclusions
Evaluation

In this section, the design process and packaging designs from Part C will be evaluated.

Herbal Essences Shampoo & Conditioner
The FMCG design process was difficult. The shampoo market is quite saturated, and it seemed hard to create a truly innovative design with a good ritual story. Despite the difficulties in designing the ritual, the approach was helpful to find associations that might fit the brand. This created a refreshing perspective on the brand, which aided creating a design that fit the brand well, despite the significant differences from Herbal Essence’s current and past packaging designs.

Intel i9 processor
The process for this product was carried out with relative ease. The brand provided enough starting points, yet left enough freedom to create a unique design. Structurally, the design does not divert from other consumer electronics packaging designs. The uniqueness comes mainly in the way the graphic design enhances the structural design by telling a story and building up to a level of excitement in the transition phase by opening the box. Furthermore, the ‘Unite’-statement inside the box refers to the user joining the community of ‘tech people with high-end gear’, a well-respected group within the tech community.

Conclusions
It appeared to be more difficult to create a sacred packaging experience for the FMCG product compared to the consumer electronics product. Although more tests should be carried out to be able to draw definitive conclusions on suitability, the nature of the products might also suggest why the method is more suitable for the consumer electronics products. Firstly, consumer electronics are often one-time purchases and are generally more expensive. This in itself makes the products special purchases that consumers would want to spend time unpacking, which justifies an extensive design with many steps. On the other hand, FMCGs are usually purchased periodically (e.g. daily, weekly or monthly), with users getting used to the packaging designs. This does provide opportunities for designing special habits and interactions, but it is difficult to fit a ritual journey to the product. Users get used to the interactions of packaging that they use often, which reduces the excitement the user experiences.

Secondly, requirements of usability differ between the types of products. FMCGs require ease of use and convenience, minimising the number of steps to use the package. On the contrary, luxury packaging such as consumer electronics can afford complicating the unpacking process to enhance the experience. This suggests that for FMCGs, the feeling should be invoked that the brand is special, while for consumer electronics it seems to be easier to present the product as special.

Generally, the process worked well for the consumer electronics product, and it is expected that the process can benefit packaging design for other luxury products. For FMCGs, the process could work, but the scope of the ritual journey should be extended beyond packaging to include marketing efforts such as commercials and online presence, as indicated in Figure 3. For many FMCGs, the packaging itself seems to be too limiting to cover all stages of the ritual journey. Marketing efforts could improve the experience of the luxury products as well, but it is not a necessity, because luxury packaging can support more stages of the ritual journey making it a suitable vehicle for a ritual journey. In any case, it should be investigated beforehand whether a sacred experience will fit the brand.

Figure 3. Packaging types mapped to sacred customer journey. FMCGs require additional efforts from marketing to reinforce the ritual journey.
Suggestions for Further Research

The scope of this research project was limited to packaging design only. As suggested in the conclusions section, including other marketing efforts could be useful, especially for FMCG products. This would transform the design approach from a Sacred Packaging Design method to a Sacred Branding for Consumer Goods. Branding should be an integrative effort, and a sacred approach could work for certain brands.

The Sacred Services approach of Matthews (2017) benefited from a number of iterations. There seems to be potential in the Sacred Packaging Design approach as well, but not for each type of consumer packaging. In further iterations, SPD could either be improved to cover more types of consumer packaging, or the approach could be made more specific to cater to fit the luxury/consumer electronics segments better.
References


