# Business & Management Practices

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(Edited by: Duygu Fırat, Osman Yılmaz, Detelina Smilkova)



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# A NEW BRAND MANIFESTATIONS INVENTORY FOR APPLICATIONS OF BRAND AESTHETICS

Asst. Prof. Dr. Ali Alper Akgün<sup>1</sup>

#### **Abstract**

In today's fierce competitive environment, the brands that cannot distinguish themselves from competitors with the concrete features of the products have turned to brand images, which are difficult to imitate, abstract elements, in order to survive and gain competitive advantage. Brand image is shaped by the characteristics and quality of each contact or interaction between brands and customers throughout the customer journey. The origins of the brand image, which make the fundamental difference between competitors, are based on communication with customers at brand contact points. Brand aesthetics, which tackles each contact point that can be planned aesthetically as brand manifestations, aims to convey a holistic brand story to the customers in the most effective way by arranging these manifestations in a coordinated and consistent aesthetic code. It strengthens the brand identity and brand image. It is very important to know and manage brand manifestations to be esthetized by planners, in this process. Despite this significance, literature review shows there are not many studies about brand manifestations used in the context of brand aesthetics. In addition to this, differences and conflictions have been observed in the few studies on the subject. The study aims to provide a clear and understandable inventory list of brand manifestations that can be used in brand aesthetics applications to the researchers and practitioners. In this respect, on the one hand, the brand manifestations included in the current studies have been re-examined and on the other hand, the literature on brand contact points has been reviewed, the necessity for a new inventory list has been put forward due to the reasons and a current inventory list has been created and presented to the use of researchers and practitioners.

Keywords: Brand Manifestation, Brand Aesthetic, Brand Touchpoint

#### 1. Introduction

The brand identity that forms the basis of the differences points that will distinguish the brand from the competitors, consists of tangible elements that appeal to the senses, that can be seen, that can be touched, whose movements can be monitored (Wheeler, 2013: 4). Identity elements that manifest themselves at each point the brand contacts with customers create meaning by the connotations formed by the sensory elements they contain and enable the brand to communicate with customers. In this process, the identity elements that convey the values and meanings of the brand to the customers turn the brand contact points into a point of communication. Throughout the customer journey, the meanings created separately in the minds of the customers at each different point of contact come together as cumulative and form the brand perception. Brand perception constitutes the brand definition in the minds of customers and directly influences the success of the brand by being effective at customer's purchasing /decision making stages.

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Brand aesthetics, which is a strategic brand management tool, is related to the aesthetic planning of identity elements that distinguish brands from each other and which are the antecedent of brand perception (Schmitt&Simonson, 2000: 86). The planned aesthetization of identity elements means that aestheticization of brand contact points, which are platforms where identity elements make themselves and identity visible. Mazzalovo regards brand contact points as a brand manifestation that produce meaning (Mazzalovo, 2010: 3-4). Aesthetic treatments to brand manifestations are the subject of brand aesthetics (Mazzalovo, 2012: 17). Brand manifestations, designed with the systematic and coordinated use of sensory elements having a consistent aesthetic code, strengthen the brand identity, improve the brand by making use of the experiential (creating pleasure) and semiotic (producing meaning) dimensions of aesthetics and provide transmitting and reinforcing the desired meanings more effectively.

In the context of brand aesthetics, brand manifestations do not include all brand contact points, but brand contact points on which aesthetic applications have the potential to create aesthetic value, pleasure and meaning. It is extremely important for brands that want to ensure communication effectiveness through brand aesthetics and to transmit the desired meanings to customers effectively, to list and define these manifestations by coordinating them with each other and to make necessary updates by following the changing environmental conditions, in order to have full control over the brand manifestations they can formalize in their applications.

When the literature on brand manifestations is reviewed, despite the significance it has, there are not many studies performed on brand manifestations used in the context of brand aesthetics (Schmitt& Simonson, 2000; Mazzalovo, 2010, 2012). On the other hand, it has been observed that different studies have been carried out around different subjects (not in the context of brand aesthetics) that tackles brand contact points (Davis, Dun, Aaker, 2002; Spengler&Wirth, 2009: Liu, Sparks, Coghlan, 2014; Baxendalea, Macdonalda, Wilsona, 2015; Wind&Hays, 2016; Lemon&Verhauef, 2016; Aichner&Gruber, 2017; Sundar, 2018 etc.). Differences and conflictions have also been observed in the few available studies on brand manifestations used in the context of brand aesthetics. This study aims to create a clear, understandable and comprehensive inventory list that will guide practitioners and researchers by eliminating these deficiencies and conflictions. For this purpose, (1) the conclusions of reviews about different studies conducted in the context of brand aesthetics are included. (2) The requirement for a revision; (3) put forth together with the items to be considered in this revision according to the conclusions of reviews. (4) The literature on brand contacts -that a lot more studies have done- has been reviewed, in order to avoid possible deficiencies in accordance with new layout. Elements that are appropriate to the definition of brand manifestations in the context of brand aesthetics have been selected, to create detailed and up-to-date inventory list about brand manifestations which is an important concept in terms of brand aesthetic, to offer to the use of researchers and practitioners.

#### 2. Brand Touchpoints and Brand Manifestations In The Applications of Brand Aesthetics

Brand aesthetics are actions for planning and assembling the brand's spesific sensory in a consistent way and coherent with each other in order to convey the values and meanings of the brand at all contact points (adapted from Mazzalovo, 2012: 15-31,32). It is based on the principle that brands can convey the brand values -that customers cannot reach directly- to customers at the contact points which are the open public interfaces of the brands.

Brand aesthetics regard brand contact points where brand identity is visible, as brand manifestations that transmit meaning. Brand manifestations, as any signs which are symptom of a purpose of meaning, consist of a signifier and a signified, and are based on the relationship between them (Guiraud, 2016: 39, 43). Signifiers of brand

manifestations consist of sensory elements that brands can use at contact points. Brand aesthetics applications focus on these elements and initiate the process of meaning production by shaping them and creating different associations endued with emotional and conceptual content. Emotions and meanings formed around brand values constitute the brand's signifieds. Signifier and signified that are brought together at the level of perception and are made sense of, transform each contact point to a manifestation where brand values and brand promises are conveyed.

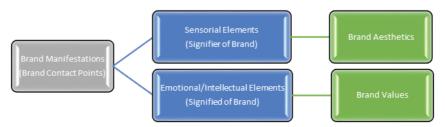


Figure. 1. Framework of Brand Manifestations (Adapted from Mazzalovo, 2000:13)

The brand manifestations, which are formalized in accordance with the brand's specific sensory approach, show the basic variables that managers need to think and decide and aesthetic treatments can be applied on. In order to apply aesthetic strategy at any brand contact point, these points must have the potential to create aesthetic value and pleasure besides the production of meaning. Brand manifestations shaped by aesthetic treatments provide unique and creative aesthetic experiences at different points where the brand contact with the customers as well as producing meaning. So it arouses their interest and draws their attention, make them open to communication, surround them and keep their attention constantly and enable them to be involved in the communication with their hearts and minds. This type of communication helps customers who are under heavy bombardment of messages to keep their messages in their minds by increasing the impact of the communication to be established, and so helps brands for more recognition, to create brand awareness, brand loyalty and brand value. Therefore, a brand contact point, which produces meanings and communicates with customers, cannot be a brand manifestation in the context of brand aesthetics unless it creates aesthetic value and pleasure (eg "price"). It should be emphasized that the brand manifestations to be formalized in the applications of brand aesthetics do not include every brand contact point.

Consistent, planned and coordinated messages sent from each brand manifestation will facilitate and accelerate making sense of brand messages in the minds and provide the opportunity to convey brand-related informations with designs that will make the brand attractive. In this respect, it is very important for brand managers to know the different manifestations that can apply the sensory approaches of the brand.

#### 3. Literature of Brand Manifestations In The Applications Of Brand Aesthetics

Although studies on different brand contact points have been found in the literature research (Davis et al., 2002; Spengler&Wirth, 2009; Liu et al., 2014; Baxendalea et al., 2015; Wind&Hays, 2016; Lemon&Verhauef, 2016; Aichner&Gruber, 2017; Sundar, 2018), there are very few studies about it in the applications of brand aesthetics (Schmitt&Simonson, 2000; Mazzalovo, 2010, 2012).

The former of these works is Schmit and Simonson's "Marketing Aesthetics" (2000). Schmitt and Simonson did not include the semiotic aspects of marketing aesthetics, which they consider as strategic management of brand

identity and image. Therefore, they preferred the term "corporate expressions" with the same meaning content instead of the sign or "brand manifestation". The authors stated that marketing aesthetics manifested itself in three basic fields: Product Design, Communication and Spatial Design at the beginning of their studies. They created a classification by briefly demonstrating (with a few example) "corporate expression" in these three fields (Schmitt&Simonson, 2000: 24). (See table.1).

Product and Graphic Design	Packaging of the Product		
Communications	Attractiveness of the presenter, color of the room in which the message given, the music surrounding the presentation		
Spatial Design	Experiential Aspects Of The Space		

Table.1. Three Field of Aesthetic

From thispoint of view, it can be concluded that Schmitt and Simonson tend to three main aesthetic fields; aesthetic of products, aesthetic of space and aesthetic of communication (Mazzalovo, 2012:60).

Schmitt and Simonson used the word "identity elements" instead of "brand manifestation" onward parts of their study and they mentioned new manifestations (identity elements) that could be used. But they didn't place these new manifestations into three main areas they had shown before (Schmitt&Simonson, 2000: 72). (See table.2).

Instruction Manuals	The Greetings on Voice Mails	Background sounds and smells in offices	Points of Purchase Displays	Signs on Office Buildings/Streets
Stock Certificates	Letterheads	News Releases	Sales Bulletins	Uniforms
Business Cards	Videos	Internet Sites	Coupons	Vehicles
Invoices	Packaging	Print and TV Ads	Showrooms	Plants
Products	Corporate Seals			

Table.2. Identity Elements

Lastly, Schmitt and Simonson distinguished identity elements to four major P types (as properties, product, publication, presentetion) by analogy to the four P's of the marketing mix (Schmitt&Simonson, 2000:73-75). They didn't give too many examples for the parts of this classification (See Table.3).

Properties	Buildings, Offices, Retail Spaces, Company Vehicles	
Product	Spesific Aspects or Attributes of The Good or Service	
Publication	Promotional Materials, Advertising, Business Cards, Stationery	
Presentation	Packaging, Labeling and Tags, Shopping Bags, Place Settings, Napkins, Appearance Of Employees	

Table.3. P Types of Identity Elements

The "properties" included in this classification can be considered as "aesthetic of space", "presentation" and "publication" can be considered as "aesthetic of communication", products as "aesthetic of products".

The second and third of these studies belong to Mazzalovo. Mazzalovo's paper "Brand Aesthetics: A New Brand Management Approach" (2010) has the characteristics of announcement of his book "Brand Aesthetics" published

in 2012. Mazzalovo mentioned brand manifestations in the context of brand aesthetics and there is no difference between the classifications he made on the subject in both of his studies. Mazzalovo, used word of "Brand Manifestations" directly in his studies. Mazzalovo created a new list by adding a new aesthetic area as called "Aesthetics of Behavior", which includes behavior of the company and actual consumers to the three areas on which Schmit and Simonson used (Akgün, 2019). Mazzalovo's brand manifestations list in the context of brand aesthetics is given in the table.4. The table also includes the manifestations that Schmitt and Simonson tackled as the "P-type identity elements" and "corporate expressions" in three aesthetic fields, thus allowing us to see the manifestations in the context of brand aesthetics that the authors deal with comparatively.

The deficiencies and conflictions that uncover as a result of the examination of the studies mentioned in Table.4 reveal that there is a need to prepare a new inventory of brand manifestations that can be used in brand aesthetics applications. The deficiencies and conflictions that form the basis of this idea and things to be done to prepare a single consistent and detailed inventory list to eliminate deficiencies and conflictions are listed in six items.

- 1-) Schmitt and Simonson mentioned manifestations (identity elements) that could be used without placing them into main aesthetic areas (Schmitt&Simonson, 2000: 72). Placing them into these areas is important and necessary in order to provide a consistent, complete and more comprehensive road map to the researchers and practitioners without contradictions.
- <u>2-)</u> Schmitt and Simonson (2000) placed whole brand manifestations on three main aesthetic areas, while Mazzalovo (2010-2012) placed four main areas. The difference between the brand manifestations tackled by the two authors is not limited to this. It was seen that the element listed as brand manifestations by one of the authors isnt listed by other. "Sounds and scents in the office" that is listed by Schmitt and Simonson, isnt listed as a brand manifestation in Mazzalovo. Similiarly "company behaviour" that is listed by Mazzalovo, isnt listed as a brand manifestation in Schmitt and Simonson.

Additionally, some of the elements included in the list of brand manifestations by both authors appear under different brand aesthetics areas. While Schmitt and Simonson discussed "Appearance of Employees" in the area of "Aesthetics of Communication", Mazzalovo examined "Uniforms, Dressing Codes" in the area of "Aesthetics of Space".

These issues should be regulated in the inventory of brand manifestations to be created. At this point, the definitions of different aesthetic areas should be made clearly and the blur between the boundaries of aesthetic areas should be eliminated.

#### Schmitt & Simonson (2000) Mazzalovo (2010:2012) Product Colours Product Forms Product Materials Product Style **AESTHETICS Product Categories** Packaging of the Product OF Number of Products **PRODUCTS** Performance of Product Product Durability Price of the Product Product Availability **Traditional Communication Activities** Advertising Attractiveness of the presenter, color of Public Relations the room in which the message given, the Events music surrounding the presentation **AESTHETICS** İnternet Promotional Materials, Advertising, Signature Systems OF Business Cards, Stationery COMMUNICATION Logo Packaging, Labeling and Tags, Shopping Stores Bags, Place Settings, Napkins, Appearance Labelling Of Employees Packaging Letterhead Points of Sale/ Offices/ Factories Locations İnternet Architectures Light **AESTHETICS** • Buildings, Offices, Retail Spaces, Decoration Windows OF Company Vehicles SPACE Sales Style • Experiential Aspects Of The Space Receptionis Layouts Dressing Code Uniforms Organigrams Manifestation of Company Behaviour Social and Ecological Activities Company and Employees conduct **AESTHETICS** Behaviour of Related Entities **OF** (Foundation, suppliers, agents, etc.) **BEHAVIOUR** · Ethical Chart **Manifestation of Actual Consumers** Who they are? What they do?

Table.4. Categorized Manifestations Discussed In The Studies In The Context Of Brand Aesthetics

- 3-) Schmitt and Simonson state that brand manifestations, which they consider as "corporate expression" have the potential to create aesthetic value and pleasure (Schmitt&Simonson, 2000: 28, 30, 51). Mazzalovo wants to present a large inventory list of brand manifestations to practitioners and researchers, as a consequence he included elements that dont have aesthetic value and the potential to create pleasure; price, accessibility etc. Mazzalovo point to that these elements were listed in order to emphasize their effects in terms of their meanings rather than the hedonic pleasures it created (Mazzalovo, 2012: 58). In this study, whose aim is to prepare a consistent inventory that is free from contradiction to researchers and practitioners, it does not seem to be a correct approach to treat these elements, which are open to semantic connotations, but which do not have the potential to create aesthetic value and pleasure, as a brand manifestation in the context of brand aesthetics. These elements, which cannot go beyond one brand contact point, should be removed from the list of brand manifestations that can be used in brand aesthetics applications in the layout to be made.
- <u>4-)</u> Some of the brand manifestations included in the authors' lists can be considered in an inclusive single heading. For example; "Windows" and "decoration" in the area of space aesthetics in Mazzalovo's list can be taken in an inclusive single heading. This point should be considered in the list to be created.
- 5-) The literature for the different brand contact points used in marketing communications can be carefully reviewed and the inventory can be expanded by including features that are not included in the classifications of Schmitt and Simonson and Mazzalovo, but which can be tackled within the scope (extent) of brand manifestations, which have the potential to create pleasure and which enable aesthetic emending. At this point, it is necessary to pay attention to the difference mentioned in the theoretical part of the study between brand touch points and brand manifestations that can be considered in the context of brand aesthetics (See also Akgün, 2019).
- **6-)** It should be emphasized that the brand manifestations in the new list to be created will not remain constant and can be enriched and updated with the higher aesthetic experiences that technology provides.

#### 4. A New Inventory List of Brand Manifestations:

The new inventory list prepared by considering the items revealed as a result of the examination of the present literature is shown in table.5.

New list consists of three main areas as shown in Table.5; aesthetics of products, aesthetics of space, aesthetics of communication. The area of "Aesthetics of Behavior" in Mazzalovo's list is not included in the new list. Mazzalovo, tackled the area of "aesthetics of behavior" in two headings as "Manifestation of Company Behavior" and "Manifestations of Actual Consumers". The author stated that the area of "aesthetics of behaviour" is a category rejected by communicators cause of active consumer manifestations cannot be planned and controlled. Mazzalovo emphasized that the brand manifestations in this area are manifestations that can be examined with the meanings they produce rather than hedonic dimensions (Mazzalovo, 2012: 58). Brand aesthetics is composed of planned, intentional, consistent aesthetic codes and has hedonic dimensions. Therefore, this area is incompatible with the structure and characteristics of brand aesthetics.

"Company and Employee Conduct" that Mazzalovo placed in the area of behavior aesthetics is an important point of interaction that influences the brand image. Alvira (2006), who draws attention to the aesthetical significance of the personal image of sales representatives and the way they treat to customers, states that working

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rhtyhm is not alien to the aesthetics of everyday life. Alvira states that treating people with good manners, courtesy, elegance and delicacy is an aesthetic behavior and he points out that these behaviors give aesthetic pleasure (As cited Mele&Canton, 2014: 155-156).

While the "aesthetics of behavior" are excluded from the new inventory list prepared for the study, "company and employee conducts (face-to-face interactions with employees of the company)", which may have hedonic dimensions and create meanings and can be formalized with planned coherent codes, that Mazzalovo has placed in the area of "aesthetics of behaviour", is considered as "face-to-face communication" under the area of "aesthetics of communication" under the title of "traditional communication activities". At first glance, although it may seem that the "personal sales" statement may be more accurate instead of this title; it is thought that "face-to-face communication" will be more inclusive since the elements such as personal appearance (dress codes, uniforms), tone of voice (customer-discourse / word), working rhythm and the manner of behaving to customers, cover not only sales representatives but all employees.

#### AESTHETIC OF PRODUCTS

Packaging Colours Forms Materials

Style Classic, Baroque, Sporty etc.

Number More/ Less, Single / Triple /Quintet /Dozen

Performance Heating/Cooling/Making Noise

Sizes Big/Small, Depth/Width, Lengthiness/Shortness

(Schmitt&Simonson, 2000: 283).

#### AESTHETIC OF SPACE

Temperature

Voice/Noise/Music

Air Quality Lighting

Scent

Architectures

Decoration Color, Furnishings, Used Materials

Settlement Order Neat, Untidy (Schmitt&Simonson, 2000: 283)
Sizes of the space Big/Small, Depth/Width, Lengthiness/Shortness

Location Aesthetic of the location where the building is situated; river side, scenic place,

crowded city street etc. (Dhebar, 2013: 203).

Orientation/Direction Signs

Landscaping Environmental Arrangement, Parking Arrangement etc.

(Okay, 2002: 153-156).

Virtual Environment Internet) Website, Blogs, Social Networks

#### **AESTHETIC OF COMMUNICATION**

#### TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

Advertising Colours, Music etc., Brochure, TV Ads, Printed Ads, Outdoor Ads. (For

detailed information about Aesthetics at Tv Ads, see Akgün&Papatya 2018)

Public Relations Promotional Materials, Corporate Identity Documents, Certificate of

Achievement and Participation, Events

Face-To-Face Communication Personal Interaction with Business and Employees. Appearance of Employees

(Dress Code, Uniforms), Voice Tone, Working Harmony, Manner of Behaving

to Customers etc.

SIGNATURE SYSTEMS

Logo

Stores Signs Stock Certificates, Signs of OfficeBuildings

(In terms of signature systems on them).

Labelling

Packaging In terms of signature systems on them.

Letterhead Envelopes, brochure forms, brand printed papers, petitions, business cards etc.

**Table.5.** A New Brand Manifestations Inventory For The Applications of Brand Aesthetics

- Aesthetic of Products: It consists of shaping the specific characteristics of the product in charge of brand and
  product managers, engineers and designers (Schmitt&Simonson, 2000: 73). It conveys the symbolic value of
  the product and forms an identity for the product. Brand aesthetics ensures that this identity is not separated
  from the brand identity and is coordinated and consistent with it.
- Aesthetic of Space: It includes the shaping of all spaces that represent the brand physically industrial sites, office workspaces, transportation vehicles, production areas, common spaces (cafeterias, meeting halls), commercial spaces (boutiques, kiosks, corners of department stores) and exhibitions and stands (trade fairs) in charge of architects and interior designers. Aesthetics of space contributes to the transmission of brand values and thus to the brand image by means of communicative messages. It provides external clues about the qualities and capabilities of a brand before purchasing to its customers and provides a working environment that will increase their motivation for business employees (Mazota, 2003: 5-6). Stein and Rameshan, who made a classification on brand touchpoints, discussed virtual environments (websites, social networks and blogs) that is formalized by web designers and graphic designers and that represent the brand and interact with customers within the scope of physical environment (Stein&Rameshan, 2016: 12). At the present time, where e-commerce and m-commerce applications have gained widespread importance, virtual space design has been tackled in the "aesthetic of space" area.
- Aesthetics of Communication: It covers all aesthetically configurable communication tools ranging from advertising and logo to letterhead. Aesthetics of communication enables shaping of complex visual identity practices in different tools with consistent aesthetic codes and increases brand awareness in communication with the target audience and contributes to the brand image. The inventory list, which is created in the study, tackles the aesthetics of communication under two headings: traditional communication activities and signature systems.

a-) Traditional Communication Activities: Advertising and Public Relations Activities, Face To Face Communication

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*b-) Signature Systems:* It includes all graphic activities except of advertising (Mazzalovo, 2012: 57). It works with graphic symbols and typography to represent the name of a firm, its brands, or its products. It is performed by advertising and public relations agencies, corporate identity businesses, graphic designers.

#### 5. Conclusion:

Encoding of intentional meanings into brand manifestations with consistent and coordinated aesthetic codes and connecting these strategically to a particular brand identity will help desired meanings to become specific to the brand. This situation, which strengthens the brand identity, will facilitate the creation of a strong brand image by ensuring that the basic values of the brand are conveyed to customers as desired (Karjelainen, 2002: 9). Today, where competition is based on images, the roots of the brand image that make the fundamental difference between competitors are rooted in brand manifestations formalized by brand aesthetics applications.

Aesthetically formalized brand manifestations are also the source of unique experiences that provide long-term competitive advantage. Despite this importance, there are few and inconsistent studies that offer practitioners an inventory list of brand manifestations that they can shape in their brand aesthetic applications. This study contributes to the literature in this field and provides an up-to-date and detailed list free of inconsistencies to researchers and practitioners. Clear definitions about different aesthetic areas are given in the study to prevent any inconsistencies that may arise in future studies.

Rapidly developing new technologies (Augmented reality (AR), Near Field Communication (NFC), IPTV and SixthSense Technology, the Internet of Objects, etc.) will enable remarkable different brand manifestations that provide richer aesthetic experiences that can be used in brand aesthetics applications (Westenberg, 2010: 2). This means new elements to be added to the inventory of brand manifestations to be created. Following these innovations and adding new manifestations to the inventory list is a necessity for researchers and practitioners. This will open the door to new studies regarding the updating of the inventory list or the brand manifestations generated by new technologies. This study, which can form the basis for these studies, will also shed light on the works that can be performed on aesthetic areas and applications that are listed in table.5. Each aesthetic area and application in the table is a field of study in itself. This study will contribute to the researcher and practitioners in their work in the subjects of brand identity, corporate identity, product identity etc.

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### Business & Management Practices

Businesses are important for economic development of nation and increasing of living standards of people. Also, management is a critical factor for both businesses because it creates utility for businesses. All the success and failure depend upon business functions and management. In this context, this book contains three important factors of business management. In the first part of the book covers strategic management subjects; especially entrepreneurship and human resource management. The second part of the book includes accounting and auditing. The third part of the book is about marketing.



