



UNIVERSIDADE  
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PORTUGUESA

HOW BRAND AND RELATIONAL MARKETING  
ARE IMPACTED BY DESIGN THINKING  
- A CASE STUDY AT TREMA PROJECT

Dissertation to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to obtain  
a Master's Degree in Communication Sciences – Marketing,  
Communication, and Advertising

By

Maria da Piedade de Utra Machado Jardine Neto

Faculty of Human Sciences

November 2021



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DISSERTATION

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Under the supervision of  
Professor Doctor Ana Filipa Oliveira

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## **Abstract**

This research aims to understand the impact that design thinking methodology can have on brand and relational marketing.

Branding helps the cultivation of a relationship between the brand and its audience by developing a value proposition that includes functional, emotional, or self-expressive aspects. Being composed of different stakeholders that affect and are affected by the brands' decisions and goals, it is key to successfully manage and elaborate on effective and satisfying symbiotic relationships with them. Relational marketing aims to develop mutually satisfying, long-term relationships between an organization and its stakeholders. It is considered the natural evolution of (product-based) transactional marketing. Being a holistic approach to relating companies and their stakeholders in a collaborative service strategy. Design thinking has been used as a moderator and as a way of driving innovation in a collective and multi-disciplinary way. Its contributions to management challenges include logistics, the effective sequencing and scheduling of objectives, instrumentalities, and the human factor in order to accomplish stated objectives.

To study and comprehend this phenomenon, different research fields that have been found to complement each other and contribute to a better understanding of reality will be combined. Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism, Freeman (1984) Stakeholder Mapping, Sequeira and Warner's (2007) construct for good stakeholder engagement, Grönroos (1996) three strategic and tactical issues of relational marketing and Gummesson's (2002) Green and Alliance Relationships are the theoretical models on which this research was based.

An interpretativist qualitative case study took place during a rebranding at Trema, a small accessories brand, in which design thinking tools were used. The goal was to investigate its impact on the brand's identity and relationship marketing strategy, as well as its stakeholder engagement. Semi-structured interviews with experts in the researched fields and with Trema's internal and external stakeholders, as well as brand document analysis, were used

to collect data. Qualitative content analysis through thematic and document analysis took place.

The findings of this research have led to the conclusion that design thinking can positively impact brands by turning to a service based offering, giving voice to their stakeholders' interests and concerns to create alliances based on mutually beneficial opportunities by systemizing and informedly planning out how the needed changes can be implemented.

Keywords: Brand identity; relationship marketing; stakeholder engagement; design thinking

## **Resumo**

Esta investigação visa compreender o impacto que a metodologia do design thinking pode ter no branding e no marketing relacional. O branding ajuda a cultivar um relacionamento entre a marca e seu público, desenvolvendo uma proposta de valor que inclui aspetos funcionais, emocionais ou auto expressivos. Este público é composto por diferentes partes interessadas, que afetam e são afetadas pelas decisões e objetivos das marcas. O marketing relacional visa desenvolver relacionamentos mutuamente satisfatórios entre uma organização e suas partes interessadas. É considerada a evolução natural do marketing transacional (baseado no produto), sendo uma abordagem holística para relacionar as empresas e seus stakeholders, através de uma estratégia de serviço colaborativo. A boa definição da identidade da marca e entendimento da sua imagem são a chave para gerir e elaborar relações simbióticas eficazes e satisfatórias com o público. O design thinking tem sido utilizado como moderador e como forma de impulsionar a inovação de forma coletiva e multidisciplinar. As suas contribuições para os desafios de gestão, incluem logística, sequenciamento e programação eficazes de objetivos. O fator humano de empatia é central para cumprir os objetivos declarados.

Para estudar e compreender este fenómeno, após uma leitura exploratória, serão combinados diferentes campos de pesquisa que se completem e contribuam para uma melhor compreensão da realidade. O prisma da identidade de Kapferer, o Mapeamento de stakeholders de Freeman (1984), a construção para um bom envolvimento de stakeholders de Sequeira e Warner (2007), as três questões estratégicas e táticas de marketing relacional apresentadas por Grönroos (1996) e a relação verde e alianças de Gummesson (2002) são os modelos teóricos sobre qual esta pesquisa foi baseada.

Uma pesquisa qualitativa interpretativista de estudo de caso ocorreu durante o rebranding da marca Trema, uma pequena marca de acessórios, no qual ferramentas de design thinking foram usadas. O objetivo foi investigar seu impacto na identidade da marca e na estratégia

de marketing relacional, bem como no envolvimento das partes interessadas. Os métodos de recolha de dados foram entrevistas semiestruturadas tanto com especialistas nas áreas em questão como com as partes interessadas internas e externas da Trema; bem como a análise de documentos da marca. Realizou-se uma análise qualitativa temática e documental de conteúdo.

Os resultados desta pesquisa levaram à conclusão de que o design thinking pode impactar positivamente as marcas que se voltam para uma oferta baseada em serviços através de um conjunto de ferramentas que ajudam na estruturação, planeamento e sistematização das mudanças necessárias.

Palavras-chave: Identidade da marca; marketing relacional; envolvimento de partes interessadas; design thinking

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis

To my mother.

Thank you for helping me to realize the importance of education in my life, for never doubting my ability to complete this journey, and for your unconditional love and support.

## **Acknowledgments**

To my supervisor, Professor Ana Filipa Oliveira, of whom I had the privilege of being a student during my masters and who inspired and guided me in completing this dissertation. My deepest gratitude for your commitment, support, and direction, as well as for your insightful remarks during this research. It has been an honor to learn from and alongside you. Thank you for helping me believe in myself and in my potential as an academic researcher.

To all of my professors with whom I have gained so much knowledge, thank you for teaching me that the research community is open to anyone who wishes to pursue it, no matter how practical their background is.

To all my Master colleagues from Universidade Católica Portuguesa. Especially to Joana Lacerda, Ricarda Drewes, and Maximiliane Fuchs, thank you for your friendship, and for always being there to share our concerns, doubts, achievements, and ambitions. Completing a master thesis during a global pandemic wouldn't have been possible without you.

To Professor Katja Tschimmel, Paulo Dias, and Rui Quinta, for sharing with me their wisdom, experience, and availability, and for helping me get a broader perspective on the results of this research. Your work and words of motivation inspired me to be more ambitious and to not give up, you made me realize the importance of my research.

To Trema, and everyone involved in the project. I appreciate your willingness to share your path, stories, and ambitions with me, for your interest in my work, and for letting me witness the change in branding and marketing towards an empathic and collaborative approach, in loco. You represent a beautiful and hopeful change.

To my family, for every single word of motivation, love, and support. Especially to my grandmother, it is a joy to have you around every day. Thank you for installing in me a curiosity-filled ambition that I will forever take with me into my life.

**Statement of original authorship**

I declare that the information contained in this thesis is the result of my own work. Where the work of others has been drawn upon, whether published or unpublished, full acknowledgments according to the academic convention used in Universidade Católica Portuguesa have been given. I also hereby declare that this thesis has not been published before or presented in any university. In addition, I was careful in ensuring that this work is original, and has not been taken from other sources, except where those sources are cited and acknowledged within the text.

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## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

In today's hyper-consumer society, brands often feel like one in a million when it comes to differentiating themselves from fierce market competition. With the globalization of technology, one can now communicate with millions in a click. In response to this broadening of communication reach, a change from transaction-oriented marketing to relationship-oriented marketing has been taking place (Wathne and Heide, 2006). This shift in marketing theory and practices toward relationship marketing views the business as a collective of stakeholders (Christopher et al., 1991; Payne et al., 2001; Polonsky, 1995; Polonsky et al., 2002). Relationship marketing theory offers an agenda for stakeholder engagement by emphasizing stakeholder collaboration beyond the immediate nature of market transactions. In this strategy, core competencies and resources are the foundation for beneficial market relationships. Emphasizing, for example, what firms can do for customers through a total service offering, instead of what they can do to customers with just product creation and selling (Grönroos, 1996: 7). Brands are living in a fast-paced moment that translates into the constant and fast introduction of new products into the market and a permanent race towards innovation. Design Thinking has become a popular approach given its close link with managing innovation: it is effective and widely accessible, and can be integrated into all aspects of business and society, in the generation of innovative ideas (Brown and Wyatt, 2010). The core elements of Design Thinking are its visual human-centered essence and its iterative and practical set of practices and processes (Brown, 2008). The human-centered aspect of these two fields makes them stand out from other strategies and provides a possibility for parallelism between the two.

A case study will be conducted at Trema, a small Portuguese accessories brand that recently underwent a rebranding and repositioning of its vision, with the guidance of design thinking methods. Trema used to have a product-only offering, specializing in silver and up-cycled leather. Now, it also focuses on bringing together and connecting artists and master craftsmen with the goal of curating and creating meaningful objects. Due to the new collaborative nature of the brand, the impact of using Design Thinking methods on their

Relationship Marketing actions will be measured through the perspective of stakeholders, and not only consumers. The aim of this research is to analyze the results of the application of design thinking methodology to Trema's re-branding (as it shifts from an exclusively product offering brand to a product and service offering one) and verify if it has any impact on its brand identity, brand image, and relationship marketing actions, according to its stakeholders.

## **1.2. Motivation**

Coming from a design background, I developed an interest in branding and how organizations communicate themselves to reach their stakeholders. I find that everything starts with an idea and a "why", with a purpose. So I enrolled in the Communication Sciences master program, with a focus on Marketing, Communication, and Advertising because, to me, most of the success of a project depends on the effective communication of the main idea as well as the engagement of those with whom the idea resonates with. Design Thinking, Marketing, and Branding knowledge fields are complementary, and parts of a whole, when it comes to the success of a brand. The human-centered approach is key in all of these backgrounds. Design thinking has been used as a moderator for years, as a way of driving innovation in a collective and multi-disciplinary way (Cooper, Junginger, and Lockwood, 2009). Relational marketing aims to establish long-term, mutually satisfying relationships with its key constituents in order to win and/or maintain business with them (Kotler and Keller, 2013) and branding helps the cultivation of a relationship between the brand and its audience by developing a value proposition that includes functional, emotional, or self-expressive aspects (Aaker, 1996). My goal as a researcher is to further study and comprehend this phenomenon by combining different research fields that can complement each other and contribute to a better understanding of reality.

### **1.3. Research Goals**

The main goal is to combine Design Thinking methodology, Relational Marketing, and Branding fields of knowledge and try to apply them to a small company (Trema) undergoing a rebranding implementation to see its effects on how the new branding is communicated to its stakeholders and how they are engaged. A second goal will be to understand if the use of design thinking has any impact on the gap verified between brand identity and brand image, according to the brand's stakeholders. Therefore, we plan to study this phenomenon in order to contribute to the existing literature by looking at design thinking from a marketer viewpoint. We intend to unveil some information according to the following specific goals:

- Explore and understand the concepts of brand image, brand identity, relationship marketing, stakeholder theory, and design thinking;
- Explore the models provided by literature on these topics, and apply the most fitting to a real-life branding context;
- Verify if there is any impact on how the brand identifies itself;
- Verify if there is any impact on how the stakeholders relate to the brand.

In conclusion, in order to address these research goals and to guide this thesis, the research question is:

**How are Branding and Relational Marketing impacted by Design Thinking?**

## **Chapter 2 - Methodology**

In this chapter, the methodology followed in this research project will be detailed, providing clarity on the research question considering that “the method section describes in detail how the study was conducted “This description should provide the reader with sufficient information to evaluate the appropriateness and integrity of what will be done as well as the credibility of the outcomes derived from doing it. The goal here is to provide essential information that allows others to comprehend the study” (Hancock and Algozzine, 2006: 79).

### **2.1. Research Strategy**

The scientific positioning of this research is of interpretativist nature. “Interpretativism recognizes the subjective meaning of social interaction and states the results may differ from the agent, location, and time in which it is implemented. Qualitative researchers look for the understanding of complex connections between reality and their agents.” (Maxwell, 2012: 214).

This study is conducted within a qualitative methodology approach due to its exploratory nature and purpose: to further investigate how branding and relationship marketing are impacted by design thinking.

According to Robert Yin, a case study research is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2009: 18). John Gerring (2004) states that a case study is an in-depth study of a single unit (...) where the scholar’s aim is to elucidate features of a larger class of similar phenomena” (Gerring, 2004: 341). A case-study strategy was chosen, as the conditions enumerated by Yin were present. The research question starts with “How”; the researcher has no control over the events, the focus of the

investigation is contemporary (as opposed to a historical approach); and the investigation requires an in-depth description of a social phenomenon (Yin, 2009).

The use of theory is essential to guide and delimit its findings, which might be a limitation given our context and area of study (Yin, 2009: 43). It is important to keep in mind that the theoretical framework is based on what was found in the academic sources available in the languages and platforms attainable to the researcher. The object of analysis in this case study was Trema's rebranding in terms of brand identity, relationship marketing, and stakeholder engagement, before and after the introduction and implementation of design thinking methods. A longitudinal single case study took place, in which the same phenomenon is to be studied at different points in time. Since Trema, at the time of this research, was undergoing a rebranding process, various marketing actions were evaluated prior to and after the implementation of design thinking methods in the brand. The subject is the same but at different points in time. "The theory of interest would likely specify how certain conditions change over time, and the desired intervals to be selected would reflect the presumed stages at which the changes should reveal themselves" (Yin, 2009: 49). A holistic case study design was followed for the concepts we aim to relate make for a need to "examine only the global nature of an organization or of a program" (Yin, 2009: 50).

The chosen research design was Maxwells' interactive design. It consists of the steps of a research study and how these steps may influence and be influenced by one another. It does not propose any particular order for these parts or any necessary directionality of influence, being fluid and interactive. The benefit of using Maxwell's model is its flexibility: it allows for the necessary readjustments between phases to be made at any given time of the research.

1. It identifies as components of design, the fundamental topics about which choices need to be made. These faults are therefore less likely to be ignored and can be handled regularly.
2. It accentuates the interactive nature of design choices in qualitative and applied research and the multiple connections among the design components.
3. It provides a model for the structure of a proposition for a qualitative study. This structure is based on the communication and justification of the major design decisions and the connections among these. (Maxwell, 2013: 5).

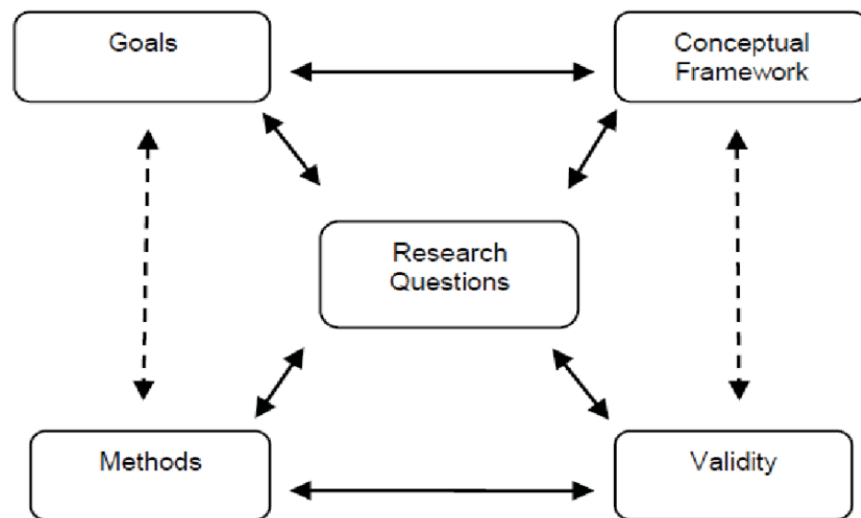


Figure 1: Maxwell's 2013 Interactive Research Design

The interactive research design applied to this particular research, through the application of the previously stated research goals, conceptual framework and validity can be presented as the following:

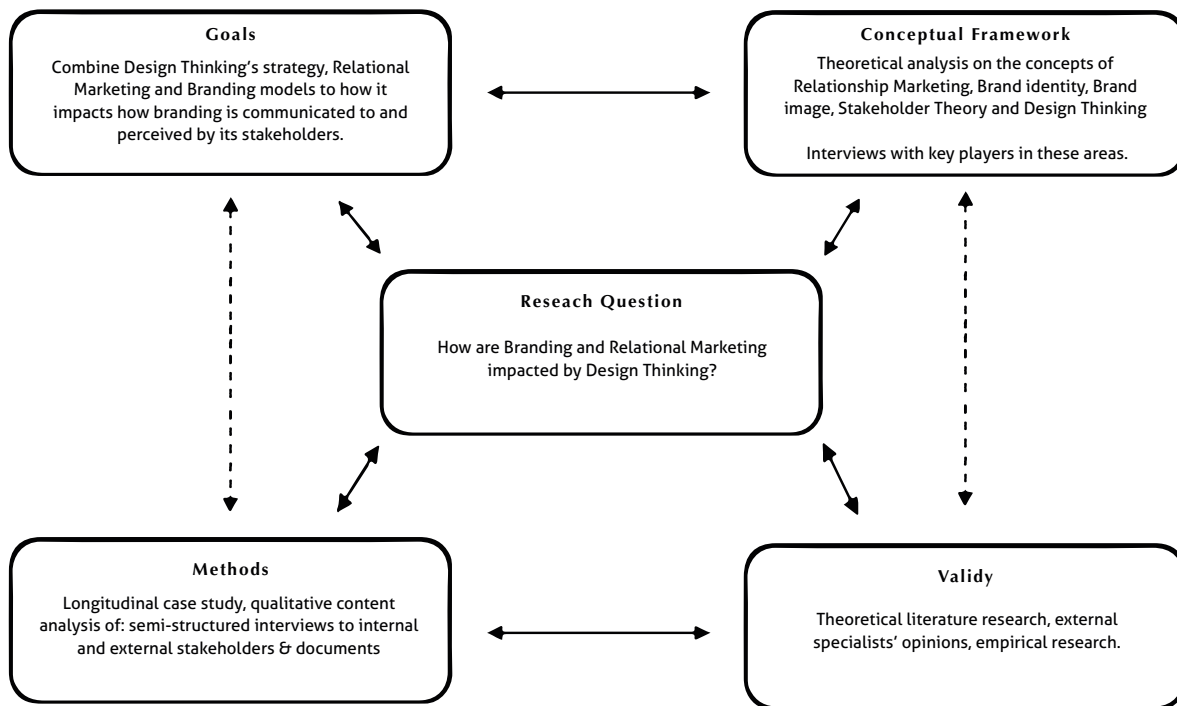


Figure 2: Interactive model phases applied to this research

### 2.3. Research Site

Trema is a small collaborative project focused on the up-cycling of otherwise redundant materials, made by designers and master craftsmen in order to create unique, long-lasting objects as well as serve as a platform for artists and artisans to share their work, find each other, and create value together through meaningful partnerships and creations.

The company has a total of three board members (two of them being the founders and all actively working at Trema), two recurrently hired freelancers, and a network of artisans, artists, and suppliers. The relevance of studying this company's brand identity, brand image, and relationship marketing strategy are driven by the number of collaborations and partnerships it aims to achieve. For the brand to be successful in this objective, the new branding has to be clear and effective so that whoever resonates with its vision reaches out to them. Design thinking tools provide a systematic and empathetic view of problems. If Trema's rebranding is successfully implemented according to its brand identity, the ground

is set for the brand vision to be successfully implemented: the coming together and creation of value by and for its current and future stakeholders. Because it is a people-centered approach, it is conjectured that design thinking and relationship marketing can provide pertinent insights on how to present a clear brand image used to engage with stakeholders. The findings of this research can hopefully later contribute to the academic literature regarding these areas.

By the time the research in the field took place, the organization had already fully implemented the rebranding, having renewed its Instagram page in late February and launched the new website in early May. For this reason, it is the perfect timing for the first collection of data.

## **2.4. Data Collection Methods**

All data collection methods were utilized to compile and validate the results, as detailed below. The decision to choose any of the two methods was taken after weighing the combined set of possible advantages and disadvantages in the light of the research done by Maxwell (2013), Yin (2009), Patton (1990), and Hancock and Algozzine (2006) before being significantly fitted for this investigation.

### **2.4.1. Semi-Structured interviews**

As a logical link between the literature review and research goals, semi-structured interviews with experts (key players on the subjects in study in this research) and with Trema's stakeholders were conducted. The choice of method was semi-structured interviews, to give the researcher the possibility of converging consensually agreed upon information. "They ask open-ended questions and probes for in-depth responses about people's experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings, and knowledge; interview data consists of verbatim quotations with sufficient context to be interpretable" (Patton, 2015:

86). With the objective of understanding the interviewee's vision and experience in order to comprehend their thinking, Patton (1990: 283) believes that it is via the use of a semi-structured or guided interview that more comprehensive and complete results are obtained. To ensure this occurs, the interviewer has a list of questions that will be explored explore during the interview. The interview's topics are briefly disclosed before the interview's start, but the interviewer chooses the order in which que questions are asked based on the interviewee's responses and retains the right to modify the interview's content entirely. This method provides targeted information related to the research goals as well as insightful data from the perspective of each interviewee. Potential limitations of this method are responsive bias and reflexivity as the interviewees might answer what they assume the interviewer want to hear. This limitation is tackled by the reassurance of the interviewer to the interviewees that there is no right or wrong answer, that I am asking the questions as an unbiased and external researcher, and that the goal is to know their own experience and perspective. Interviews with open-ended answers were done, and interview guides were completed as a conducting tool. The goal of this method was to gather as much diverse information as possible, as well as guarantee compatibility of responses and diminish the effects of interviewer biases. This method allowed for analysis and organization to be facilitated (Hancock and Algozzine, 2006: 42). Then, analysis and correlation were done in order to draw insights shown in the case study section of this research.

#### **2.4.1.1. Semi-structured interviews with specialists**

The sampling method regarding the choice of specialists used was convenience sampling, defined as a non-probability sampling technique where subjects are selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher. The selection of experts was decided upon Maxwell's calculated criteria that state: "settings, persons, or activities selected deliberately to provide information that is particularly relevant to your questions and goals" (Maxwell, 2013: 97). Therefore, the experts chosen, three in total, are design thinking experts working with design thinking consultancy for businesses and design

thinking academic teaching, and one marketing expert also specialized in design thinking consultancy. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic situation, interviews were held through the videoconference platform Zoom, and not in person. The interviews were recorded, with the previous knowledge and consent of the interviewees and were held in English. The guides will cover questions regarding the conjectured impact that design thinking can have on branding, relationship marketing approaches, and stakeholder engagement. Each interview guide will be adapted to each expert's profession and specialization as well ongoing responses. Due to the holistic and interactive nature of the research, it was encouraged that the experts diverged and delved into other related topics. All transcriptions were done by the researcher. An inductive, iterative process of reading and rereading these transcriptions was used to produce subcategories for information analysis within the context of the research question. Statements were split into units, grouped in common category headings, analyzed, and summarized (Hancock and Algozzine, 2006: 42). The use of these interviews was to confirm what was conjectured according to the literature review could be verified in a real-life context, according to the specialists' experience.

#### **2.4.1.2. Semi-structured interviews with Trema's internal and external stakeholders**

Using again a semi-structured open-ended interviews approach and following Dawdon Hancock and Bob Algozzine's (2006) guidelines on the book "Doing Case Study Research A Practical Guide for Beginning Researchers", each "subject" was asked an adapted set of questions. This provided the researcher with the possibility to understand the organization's need for a rebranding, according to the rebrand's identity, as well as how that implementation has impacted the brand's relationship marketing. The total number and description of the interviewees were: two founders, two ex-employees, two occasionally hired freelancers, two artists, and two collaborators/ creative partners of Trema. Resulting in a total of nine interviews. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic situation, interviews were held through the videoconference platform Zoom, and not in person. The interviews

were recorded, with the previous knowledge and consent of the interviewees and were held preferably in English, unless preferred otherwise by the interviewee in which case they were held in Portuguese and later translated for uniformization purposes. Three separate guides were written: one adapted to the founders, one to the internal stakeholders, and one to the external stakeholders. In one or two situations, the combination of two guides took place (for example when interviewing the founders, both the founder question guide and the internal stakeholder question guide were used; or two of the stakeholders that had been internal previously).

Interview content and questions' guide were based on Trema's founders' and some of their internal and external stakeholders' understanding of the following topics:

- Brand identity before the rebranding;
- Definition of stakeholders and Trema's relationship with them
- Explanation of the need for the rebranding;
- Brand identity after the rebranding;
- Definition of current and ideal future stakeholders and Trema's relationship with them;
- Concerns and hopes regarding the implementation and perception of brand image.
- Stakeholder Engagement & Relationship marketing practices

Semi-structured interviews with Trema's external stakeholders: artists, artisans, and jewelers.

- Brand image before the rebranding;
- Brand image after the rebranding;
- Relationship Marketing before rebranding;
- Relationship Marketing after rebranding;
- Stakeholder Engagement practices.

The use of these interviews is to confirm if the prepositions (according to the literature review, to the specialists' opinions, and to Trema's rebranding implementation insights) can be verified in all chosen variables.

Relation to the phenomena under study	Functions	Code	Date	Duration
Specialists	Design Thinking; Marketing, Design & Creativity for Business Innovation; Strategic Consultancy, Design Management and Entrepreneurship	IS1	18.10.2021	0h51m45s
		IS2	19.10.2021	0h44m31s
		IS3	20.10.2021	0h45m37s
Internal Stakeholders	Founder; Co-Founder; Designer & Freelance photographer; Product Designer	II1	26.10.2021	0h51m52s
		II2	26.10.2021	0h39m10s
		II3	28.10.2021	1h05m29s
		II4	29.10.2021	0h39m18s
External Stakeholders	Partnership Jeweler 1; Partnership Jeweler 2; The Collective Artist 1; The Collective Artist 2; Freelance videographer	IE1	26.19.2021	0h20m01s
		IE2	26.10.2021	0h21m25s
		IE3	27.10.2021	0h17m12s
		IE4	29.10.2021	0h27m21s
		IE5	31.19.2021	0h19m11s

Figure 3: Interviewees and interview data

#### 2.4.2. Document Analysis

For a holistic and visual approach to the research in practice, the interview information will be supplemented with complementary documentation. This combination of methodologies enables triangulation by allowing different ways to complete and corroborate on one another, as well as data collection on more than one way of the phenomenon under research, thus meeting the aims described by Maxwell (2013: 102). The documents collected were retrieved after the interviews, to provide examples of the information mentioned by the internal stakeholders, mainly. Most sources, especially in regards to brand identity and image will require an interpretative evaluation from the researcher since these concepts were not clear for example, before the rebranding implementation of the brand

under study. They will be collected by courtesy of the brand's founders and designers, as well as from the brand's social media and website. The documents collected can either provide a descriptive example of what has been mentioned by the interviewees or an interpretation of the researcher.

“These four categories of documents—the Internet, private and public records, physical evidence, and instruments created by the researcher— are not mutually exclusive. When used separately or in conjunction, they provide a rich source of information with which to augment data collected through interviews and observations.” (Hancock and Algozzine's 2006: 158)

Due to the design background of the researcher, imagery analysis will be avoided, to promote unbiased conclusions. These criteria were followed as suggested by Hancock and Algozzine's (2006: 53) questions to answer when gathering information from the documents' checklist.

## **2.5. Data Analysis Method**

In this research, the qualitative content analysis method was chosen to analyze retrieved data, resulting from both thematic analysis and document analysis combined.

Thematic analysis is defined by fragmentation of the collected data and its subsequent rearrangement into categories that facilitate comparison between information mentioned in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical conclusions (Maxwell, 2013: 107). This method examines each new piece of information in light of a specific research topic in order to develop a speculative solution to the question (Hancock and Algozzine, 2006: 61). In this research, relevant information to answer the research questions was coded and associated between them. The thematic analysis aims to discover frequent or significant themes in qualitative data and to interpret the information in light of these patterns. This analysis involves a “basic process—repetitive, on-going review of accumulated information in order to identify recurrent patterns, themes, or categories” (Hancock and Algozzine, 2006: 61). The authors add that a case study research report should include references to relevant literature and how that material informs the study

questions, and suggest the following questions being asked to aid in synthesizing information (Hancock and Algozzine, 2006: 63):

“What information from different sources goes together? Within a source, what information can be grouped? What arguments contribute to grouping information together? What entities bounded by space and time are shared? How do various sources of information affect findings? What information links various findings together? What previous work provides a basis for analysis? What questions are being answered? What generalizations can be made?”

Unlike other types of research, in a case study approach the researcher’s bias often emerges in the search for confirmation to his prepositions in a real-life context. To combat this bias and make sure the answers were as impartial as possible, the information gathered from the specialists’ interviews served as a living literature review. The goal of these statements from key players in the areas of study was to give credibility and validity to the conclusions driven from the stakeholder interviews and document analysis. If the data correlates, it may be evidence that what is being studied is not a single happening but a significant result that can contribute to the validity of the conclusions of this research.

## **2.6. Ethical Considerations**

As for the ethical considerations, of this research: all participants were aware that the information collected during the interviews and the document analysis would be used in this research, for academic purposes. Additionally, all participants were informed that their interviews would be filmed and that the audio recordings would be completely transcribed following the data collection phase. All three specialists reviewed transcriptions of their own interview content to ensure its quality and integrity, for their names were used in this research. Consent was given by all participants in written form, before the collection of data. As for Trema’s stakeholders, there will be no need to disclose their names, even though none of them are opposed to being identified. Information collected during interviews was kept in a personal computer, ZOOM cloud, and backed up in an external hard drive, both are under the direct control of the researcher with access guarded by passwords. As this research concerns design thinking and relationship marketing, both

being areas that involve a deep human-centered and empathetic approach, the research includes personal information and personal feelings of the brand's stakeholders, but no significant conflict of interest was foreseen.

## **2.7. Validity and Limitations**

To certify the scientific validity of any empirical social study, in which this case study is included, Yin (2009: 76) enunciates four tests to apply: Construct validity to determine the appropriate performance measurements for the topics being examined; Internal validity (can only be used exclusively for explanatory or causal research, not for descriptive or exploratory studies) to demonstrate a causal link between two events, in which some circumstances are considered to cause other events, as opposed to tendentious associations); External validity to specify the scope within which the findings of the research can be generalized), and Reliability to prove that a study's processes, such as data gathering techniques, can be replicated with the same outcomes. Yin (2009: 40) also presents tactics to use to each test as well as the timing to implement them:

- **Construct Validity**

Case study tactic: Use multiple sources of evidence (occurs during data collection); Establish a chain of evidence (occurs during data collection); Have key informants review draft case study report (occurs during composition);

- **Internal Validity**

Case study tactic: Do pattern matching; Do explanation-building; Address rival explanations; Use logic models; (all occurring during data analysis);

- **External Validity** (not applicable to this research, as the author states it is “mainly a concern for explanatory case studies, when an investigator is trying to explain how and why event x led to event y” [Yin, 2009: 79]);

Case study tactic: Use theory in single-case studies; use replication logic in multiple-case studies; (both occurring during the research design);

- Reliability

Case study tactic: Use case study protocol; develop case study database (both occurring during data collection);

In accordance with the Construct Validity tactic, to ensure the highest possible quality of this case study, multiple sources of evidence were combined, with triangulation assisting in mitigating verifiability risks. An evidential connection between sources was formulated to link them to one another and the drafts were periodically reviewed by the advisor of the researcher.

In terms of External Validity, to determine the generalizability of the research's conclusions beyond this specific case study, the theory was a keystone in this research's design, as mentioned in sub-chapter 2.1. Also, the interviews with specialists validate these findings as they themselves state to have witnessed similar results from their own experiences and examples. This can be verified in chapter 4.

The goal of reliability is to reduce the study's inaccuracies and prejudices. In this particular research, the followed protocol was based on Hancock and Algozzine's (2006) guidelines. Also, detailed information on the research methods is presented in this chapter.

The scope and limitations of this research were acknowledged and put into perspective. The case-study site is a small company, in which a rebranding has recently just been implemented. A smaller company betters the chances of the brand identity being closely understood by its internal stakeholders. However, due to the brand's newfound collaborative mindset, and therefore the involvement of new stakeholders, it had a high potential for contribution to the theoretical ideas and research question as data could be

collected and interpreted in a valid way, in accordance with the time limitation. In a big company, rebranding results tend to take longer to be perceived and therefore analyzed.

Another possible limitation of this study is the internal and external bias. As Hancock and Algozzine state: “acknowledgment of one’s biases combined with an explanation of how the researcher prevented those biases from influencing the research process and findings lessens the likelihood that the researcher will be accused of producing contrived findings.” (Hancock and Algozzine, 2006: 66). To minimize the bias of this research, the following preventative measure were undertaken:

- Fully disclose to all involved in this research of the academic design background of the researcher;
- An explanation was given to all interviewees that the findings would be used for academic purposes, and if otherwise the interviewees’ consent would be asked for;
- Reflexive writing approaches were used to preserve a crucial distance between the researcher and the phenomena under investigation, most notably through the frequent use of direct quotes to allow interviewees to disclose facts in their own words;
- Interviews undertaken were all done with open-ended responses, strengthening the comparability of responses, increasing data integrity for each interview, reducing interviewer biases, and facilitating analysis and organization.

### **To conclude Chapter 2:**

This chapter discussed the methodology used to develop and perform the study in order to answer the research question. From a qualitative research perspective, a variety of concerns were discussed, including the research strategy, the research site, the data collection methods, the data analysis methods, and ethical considerations. The conceptual framework and techniques employed in this study are summarized in Figure 2.2:

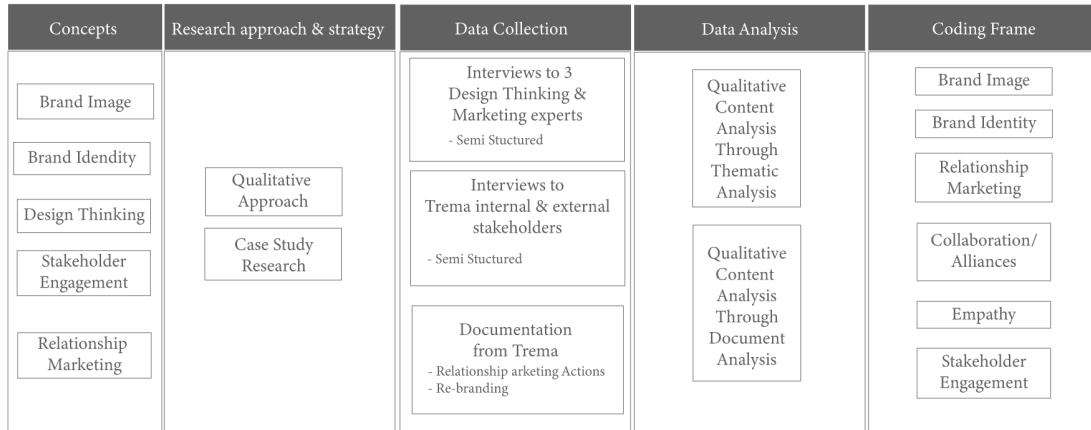


Figure 4: Conceptual framework and methodology of this research

## **Chapter 3 – Conceptual Framework**

The theoretical framework is based on four different concepts: branding, relationship marketing, stakeholder engagement, and design thinking. In this chapter, a literature review will be presented on each topic, including definitions and scopes of the study, as well as the connections between them that are considered most relevant for this research.

### **3.1. Brand**

This subchapter's objective is to clarify and address the concept of brand, brand image, and brand identity. A historical background of the term "brand" will be summarized as well as different authors' definitions and statements on the topic. A few brand image and brand identity models will be presented in order to shed light on how these concepts can be evaluated within an organization.

#### **3.1.2. Historical Background of the Brand**

The concept of brand is as abstract as it is vital today. It has evolved alongside the consumer. It is not a product, a logo, or even a slogan... It is the imprint it leaves on anyone who encounters it. As the consumer's needs and tastes became more specific, so did branding. The term "brand" originated from Old Norse "brandr", which translates to the verb "to burn", concerning the use of burnt marks onto products (such as cattle, pottery) by producers. These marks were made to identify the ownership of goods (Rajaram, S., & Shelly, C. S. 2012).

The Industrial Revolution was a great factor in the creation of the concept of branding as we know it. At the beginning of the 20th century, demand was much higher than supply, so companies were "production-oriented" as well as locally based. With the Industrial Revolution, mass-produced goods became increasingly available to the general public. With the increase in options and volume of products, companies began to fight for market share, through the differentiation of products. Since the public was used to familiar products

instead of mass-produced and shipped ones, companies began marking a symbol on their packages to increase differentiation as well as the consumer's acquaintance with their products. When the Merchandise Marks Act and the Trade Marks Registration Act were instituted in 1862 and 1875 in the United States, they marked the commercialization of mass-produced branded consumer goods. These offered consistent quality as well as an identical shape and size. (Rajaram, S., & Shelly, C. S. 2012, p.102) However, trade-mark and brand are not always the same thing. As Brown (1925) puts it: "The term brand is often used as synonymous with trade-mark, although it does not always have the same significance. The trademark implies an exclusive property right. The brand, on the other hand, may be merely a label describing a particular variety and grade of goods" (Brown, 1925: 422).

The Second World War greatly impacted this competition between companies. Due to the production increase to cope with the war's needs and the enrichment of the masses, between the 1940s and 1950s, the buying power peaked, resulting in what was named the "Consumer Revolution". This resulted in a fierce race between brands and in the launch of new and bigger ones at a steady pace. Throughout the 1990s, transformations in the manufacturing sector, commercial relationships, communication, technology, and transportation resulted in the globalization of markets. This communication "boom" fueled a shift in mindsets, facilitated by technological innovation, the information revolution, and the opportunity to engage in audience communication and engagement. Brands started having to interact with the consumer, speaking to them in their language, spreading messages that were relevant for them. This increased the competitiveness between brands to get the audience's attention. As a result, "marketing starts to be oriented towards the multiple relationships that are established" (Martins, 2006: 34).

Therefore, the concept of brand has come a long way since the use of the word "brand". Nowadays, it means a variety of attributes given to a product selling company, a person, or an entity, as it can be defined as "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of

them, which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors.” (Kotler 1991: 442)

According to Gardner and Levy (1955), consumers had to choose and distinguish between brands that offered the exact same product or service. When several companies offer the same thing, with no practical difference between them, what makes one or the other stand out is that “People buy things not only for what they can do but also for what they mean” (Gardner and Levy, 1955: 118) For the first time, the conversation was about how consumers perceived the brands and not just how brands communicated their products. The tables had turned, and the power of a brand now rested with the audience rather than the selling company. This was the beginning of the brand image, which will be addressed next.

To summarize, the origin of the brand comes from the need to differentiate from competitors and, later, to increase familiarity with consumers. It has evolved until its current state: where it is defined by a differentiation factor that lies in how the consumer perceives the brand.

### **3.1.3. Brand Image**

Since the 1950s, brand image has been a pivotal term in marketing and consumer behavior research. However, there has been much debate and a small amount of agreement around its definition due to its widespread use. Dobni and Zinkhan (1990) gathered brand image definitions from 28 studies over a 35-year time period and reached the conclusion that there is little unanimity on what brand image actually is. Nonetheless, most authors do agree that consumers base their brand preferences on something more than just physical product attributes. Gardner and Levy have been credited with defining brand image in a meaningful form in their 1955 article “The Product and The Brand”. They proposed scratching beneath the surface and identifying more enduring motivations for purchase. Their conception was that products had a social and psychological nature as well as a physical one and that the

sets of feelings, ideas, and attitudes that consumers had about brands, their image of the brands, were crucial to purchase choice.

Brand Image has evolved in time and with the consumer, so it is relevant to get a sense of several definitions to have a broader view of the term for this research. The way in which brand image is defined determines the nature of research questions that are posed, the methods that are used, and ultimately how findings are translated to the creative process (Reynolds and Gutman, 1984). In Dobni and Zinkhan's 1990 article, definitions are divided into five categories: blanket definitions, emphasis on symbolism, emphasis on meaning, emphasis on personification, and emphasis on cognitive or psychological elements.

The first category refers to blanket definitions, which are those that are too broad to contribute to the practical understanding of brand image but still relevant to recognize due to the generic sense of brand image in a more abstract way. Such as that a product is the sum of the meanings it communicates when looked at or used. A brand is the result of everything people associate with it in several dimensions, being functional, economic, social, and psychological. It depends on the user's opinion. Being the total of impressions the public has of the brand is what makes the brand image, even if different types of consumer groups have different attitudes towards it. The way in which the usage of the product is shown is also an important factor for how the brand is perceived and later associated with it. However, how a brand is perceived also depends on the attitude and disposition of the customer, which can derive from the lack of interest, disengagement with advertising, or the over-crowdedness of the marketplace, making it harder for brands to stand out and make themselves known to their target audience. If the consumer's attention is gained, then the brand image is the way they perceive that product in numerous factors, such as their emotional response to it, the way they talk about it, and other factors that were still only partially understood at the time.

The second category relates to emphasizing the importance of symbolism, in which it is concluded that people consume not only for a purpose but also for personal or social meaning. As symbology is present in all mediated interactions, the interpretation of something (a product, image, behavior, etc.) is always biased due to other feelings and pre-conceived ideas. The author also explains that a symbol is appropriate when the product increases or encourages what the consumer already thinks of himself. The concrete functional utility is differentiated from the branded product as a good, the symbolic value, and the way in which the brand can enhance the consumer's self-esteem and status. Technical aspects, product characteristics, and financial value or social suitability associated with a product or brand are what constitute brand image from a symbolism standpoint.

The third category, emphasis on meanings or messages, means that brand image is viewed as the result of an interpretation of "nonverbal communication" transmitted by the user. The product message can be considered a marketing strategy or as a natural way to differentiate a product or service from its competitors. The lens through which the world is viewed is defined by the connections and preferences of the user, who then develops a preference for a certain kind of brand. When a product resonates with the personal values and belief systems of a consumer, an adequate affiliation is created. A meaning profile refers to the meanings from which product categories are derived. (In more recent studies, Jones [2017] adds that branding affects our intellectual brains, as well as our intuitive, pre-conscious reasoning, and emotions on a deeper level. Branding affects how we act by altering how we think and, more importantly, how we feel).

The fourth category, definitions with emphasis on personification, is based on the premise that brands have a personality, just as people do. This translates into the description of a product in the same way one would describe a human being, which can be considered a strategy to generate awareness of the product as a result of people preferring products that correspond to the way they view themselves. These personality traits are not just dictated

by material-related factors (a product or service's physical characteristics) but also by aspects such as advertising, price, stereotypical general users, and other marketing and psychological associations. One must not confuse brand image with brand personality. The first is determined by the audience or consumer, while the second is determined by the organization and is defined by Aaker (1991) as the sum of human attributes associated with a brand (a concept that will be discussed further in chapter 3.1.4.). A more recent article adds that the usage of a certain brand can in fact alter the way in which the consumer views himself. A strong and positive brand can provide significant customer value by lowering the work and risk of purchasing something while also allowing us to express ourselves via the purchase and use of that brand (Barwise, 2010).

Finally, we have the fifth category, which aggregates definitions with an emphasis on cognitive or psychological elements. As mentioned above, Gardner and Levy (1955) define brand image as the set of ideas, feelings, and attitudes consumers have towards a brand, also known as the social and psychological nature of a product or service. To the authors, brand image consists of the perception of the brand's personality, which they consider more relevant than the product's technical and practical qualities. Martineau (1957) considers the brand image of a product alluring to the buyer's personality, becoming a reflex of their own when coming into contact with it. Brand image is not isolated and static, but a constantly moving idea dictated by the consumer's knowledge, attitude, and predisposition towards the brand resulting from a biased impression. Every consumer has a different way of recognizing and processing information, as well as different tastes and belief systems. This means the brand image of a product or service is not universally identical. The image lies in the mind of the beholder – and the beholder impacts the perception of the brand as much as the product's characteristics do. The brand image does not belong to the brand but to the audience that comes into contact with it and interprets what they are encountering through the lens of their own experience. The term “image” can also be considered nothing less than an abstract term that gathers the information retained by the consumer from past advertising, reputation, and social stereotypes. Brand image is defined by comparing the

image of a brand to what the audience forecasts, what the audience or consumers expect from a brand, advertising, product, even language, and design-wise.

After the thorough examination of the previous authors and more, Dobni and Zinkhan (1990) conclude the following:

“The product's attributes, the sponsoring organization, the marketing mix, the modes through which people tend to perceive, personal values, experience, the types of people associated with the use of the brand, and a number of context variables have all been said to be among the factors that contribute to the development of a particular brand's image.”

What the authors state in their conclusions is by no means an absolute definition of brand image, but rather a compilation of the ideas presented by different authors in their time. Like any scientific paper, it suggests a view of the world as it is known at the time and is always open for discussion and further development as knowledge on the topic evolves. This being stated, the authors consider brand image to be the audience's perception of a brand. It is mostly a subjective and perceptual phenomenon shaped by external interpretation, whether rational or emotional, that the technical, functional, or physical problems of the product have nothing to do with the brand image. Rather, marketing activities, context variables, and the perceiver's attributes influence and shape it, and lastly, when it comes to brand image, the perception of reality is more significant than the actual reality. As a result, a brand image can be defined as a set of benefits and features that distinguish a company from its competitors in the eyes of the audience. It contains information about how a company is perceived and differentiated from other brands, and it reflects on the consumer, who chooses a brand partly based on the image of themselves they want to showcase to the world.

Kapferer (2002: 4) adds that:

“Image is the mental representation of a stimulus by a group of people. It is the subjective idea these people have of this stimulus ( a person, a country, a brand, a corporation,...). (...) Image is a reflexion of past actions stored in people's memory. Image is a mirror, more or less reliable. In itself, it is only a measure of the existing gap between communication intentions and results.”

Kapfener (2002) sums the genesis of the focus on brand image is based on the realization that stakeholders are guided by their own perceptions and that reality can be forged to fit their needs and interests.

David Aaker (1991) and Kevin Lane Keller (1993) developed the concepts of brand equity (the marketing effects attributable to the brand) to attempt to describe the effects of branding on the audience—how the consumer viewed and interpreted the brand's outputs (brand image). Aaker (1991) also distinguished brand associations into eleven dimensions: product attributes, intangibles, customer benefits, price, use/application, user, celebrity, lifestyle, product class, competitors, and country of origin. These categories and dimensions help describe the way in which brand image is acknowledged, conscious or unconsciously, in the consumer's mind, also known as an associative network memory.

According to Keller (1993), the product's brand equity is the supplementary value it can generate, compared with a similar product with fewer or no associations in people's minds. The author defines brand image as perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory. According to (Kotler and Keller, 2016: 98), all brand-related thoughts, feelings, perceptions, pictures, experiences, beliefs, and attitudes get associated with the brand node. Keller (1993) distinguishes three categories of brand associations: attributes, benefits, and attitudes. According to the author's research, attributes can be product-related or non-product-related (as price, packaging, user, and usage imagery). Brand benefits can be functional (directly solving a need the consumer has), experiential (the feeling the user gets by using the product), or symbolic (the product's effects on self-esteem and social status). Attitudes are present in the consumer's response to pricing, for example. A strong and favorable brand attitude means the consumer is comfortable and willing to pay a higher price for the brand, compared to a similar, cheaper but brandless product.

Keller (1993) considers brand image and brand awareness (the consumer's ability to identify the brand under different conditions and circumstances) to be the constitutive parts

of brand knowledge (what it is recalled/comes to mind when a consumer thinks about a brand, in response to marketing activity for that brand). He explains: “The favorability, strength, and uniqueness of brand associations are the dimensions distinguishing brand knowledge that play an important role in determining the differential response that makes up brand equity” (Keller, K. L., 1993 : 3). According to Keller (1993) brand awareness is divided into two main components: brand recall and brand recognition. Brand recall is a memory process in which a brand appears in people's minds, whereas brand recognition is a cognitive process that occurs as a result of awareness.

It can be concluded that even though most authors’ opinions differ on what are the most important dimensions are when defining brand image, for its definition has been widely discussed throughout the years, most found authors agree on the fact that it depends on external factors and the interpretation of the stakeholders. It is what the external stakeholders actually perceive of the brand. Through the associations created in their minds by their own unique and diverse lens of previous and present experience, availability, and belief systems. Brand image can derive from a name, logos, trademarks, products and services, and patterns. It can also be influenced by a variety of factors such as quality, price, experience, feelings, and reputation.

#### **3.1.4. Brand Identity**

Brand image alone does not suffice to characterize a brand. Due to the existing gap between the two, the use of brand image as a brand identity often falls short of portraying what the brand actually is. Brand identity must not only rely on what its consumers want but must also follow “the soul and vision of the brand, what it hopes to achieve” (Aaker, 1996: 70). Brand Identity is what the people within the brand want to transpose to the outside, being self-driven, not mirror-driven (Kapferer, 2002). The concept of brand identity originates from design. Design agencies, when redesigning a corporate symbol and/or graphic, use a specific coherence to describe their brand. This overall coherence in design is referred to as

brand identity (Olins, 1989). Nowadays, brand identity is no longer just the visual aspects of a brand, but much more. It is a brand dimension that must identify itself through time, validating its promises and defining the associations it seeks from consumers (Aaker, 1991).

Aaker (1996a). in his book “Building strong brands: Building, measuring, and managing brand equity”, defines brand identity as:

“a unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain. These associations represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers from the organization members. (...) (it) should help establish a relationship between the brand and the customer by generating a value proposition involving functional, emotional, or self-expressive benefits.” (Aaker, 1996a: 68)

The author then presents four brand identity perspectives, saying a brand must be considered as a product, an organization, a person, and a symbol. Aaker states that going into a precise and detailed identity is helpful to guide implementation decisions (Aaker 1996a: 78). A visual representation of Aaker’s Brand Identity Model is presented next:

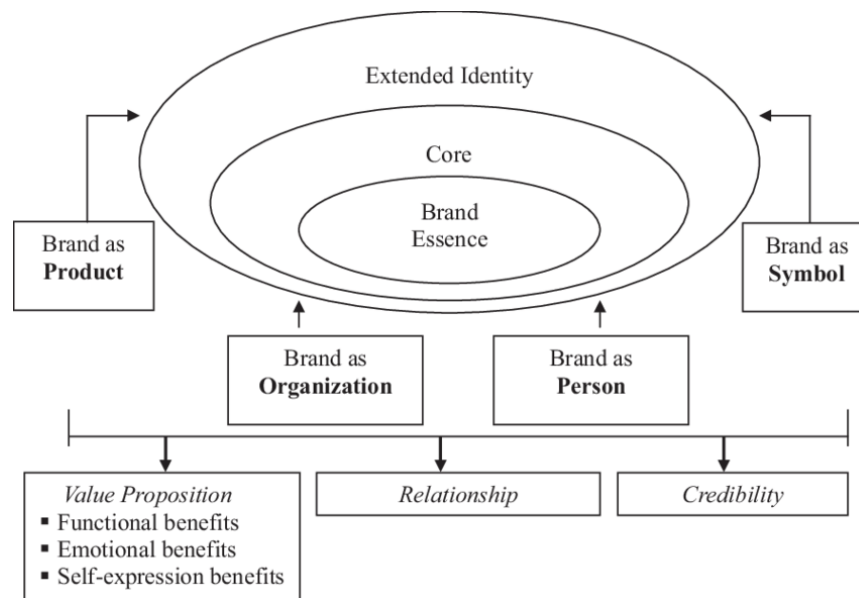


Figure 5: Aaker Brand Identity Model, 1996

### Brand as a product

Often, the first contact the audience has with the brand is through its product. Product associations will always be present in consumers' minds as they relate to purchasing decisions and brand experiences. A strong association with a product category suggests that the same brand will be recalled in that category's context. The associations can be: the product scope, the product attributes, the quality/value, use occasion, users, and the country of origin.

### Brand as an organization

Viewing a brand as an organization means focusing on the organizational attributes (e.g. innovation, consumer, concern, trustworthiness). Some of these attributes can also be product-related, or in some cases, a combination of the two perspectives can happen.

### Brand as a person

Brand personality, relating to the brand as a person, enables parallelism between the brand's and the consumer's characteristics. The brand can serve as a vehicle for consumers to express their personalities, serving as a link between the brand and the consumer, as well as a means of communicating the brand's and its products' attributes.

### Brand as a symbol

The brand as a symbol is vital to gaining recognition and recall. "A strong symbol can provide cohesion and structure to an identity" (Aaker, 1996: 84) Its attributes can be visual imagery (colors, logos, shapes) and brand heritage.

Aaker (1996) also produced a list of "brand identity traps", or common mistakes that result in weak brand identities. They highlight the importance of considering the brand in a broader context and provide guidance on what a brand identity should not be. For instance, a company's brand image, or how customers perceive the brand, is useful data. However, a brand's identity should not be defined solely by its look. Image is passive and relies on

previous memories and experiences, whereas brand identity is purposeful and forward-looking. Because it "allows the customer to decide who you are" the brand image trap is dangerous (Aaker, 1996: 116). When building a brand's identity, brands must invest time and effort to ensure that it also reflects the brand's internal aspirations, soul and essence. Instead of becoming the brand identity, the external brand image should just be used as one source of input. According to Kapferer (2012), brand managers should question themselves which of the various brand image things the brand genuinely wants to identify with, and then continue to develop those items while staying faithful to the brand's original, internal principles. When too much emphasis is placed on identifying a brand position and something to communicate rather than a brand identity, the brand position, i.e., the component of the brand identity and value proposition that is to be actively communicated to the target market, can become a trap. In the end, the corporation has an advertising line rather than a deep, complex brand identity. Another trap is deciding on a brand identity solely based on what people are purchasing. Looking for original values and purpose solely from the outside is not the way to go. It also makes it more difficult for people to embody an external rather than an internal identity. The use of corporate principles as a source of inspiration and internal communication will result in stronger brand identity. The product-attribute fixation trap is Aaker's (1996) last brand identity trap. This is the most common blunder made by brand managers. A brand is more than just a product or a service, and basing the brand identity solely on the product is unsustainable. Internal inspiration based on identity aims, and values should drive products, not the other way around.

Making what the brand believes in clear to the audience, creates an easier path towards a long-term relationship between the two. Simon Sinek's Golden Circle Model calls it the "Why" and states that "People don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it" (Sinek, 2019: 41). Kapferer (2002) finds that brands need to be compared to people. In the sense that in the same way that people have values, beliefs, and a vision, so can brands, metaphorically. However, Sinek, even if not being considered an academic author but being an ex-mad man (Madison Avenue advertiser), considers that the use of a metaphor is not

needed because behind brands exist real, living people. These people have a Why they do what they do: why they get out of bed in the morning and go to work. In his opinion, a brand will successfully connect with its audience when the marketing communication is done starting with the Why. He compares this phenomenon with great historical figures to point out that charisma is what differentiates a brand from others that provide the same exact product. This idea of the brand as a person started not with Sinek but with J. Seguela (1982), a European creative director from the 70s and 80s. His revolutionary idea that brands are like people caused a disconnect between product and brand, making the brand's origin an entity rather than the product itself. This was groundbreaking at the time because it was found that people could relate much more easily to another human being than to a product.

Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism (2009) explains this idea. The author presents six facets of the added value of Brand Identity. They are (i) the physical facet and (ii) the personality facet of the brand. However, the brand identity prism also emphasizes (iii) the relationship facet, and (iv) the cultural facet of the brand. Finally, the last two facets are the (v) customer reflection and (vi) the customers' self-concept. Here is a visualization of Kapferer's prism and the according definitions of each facet:

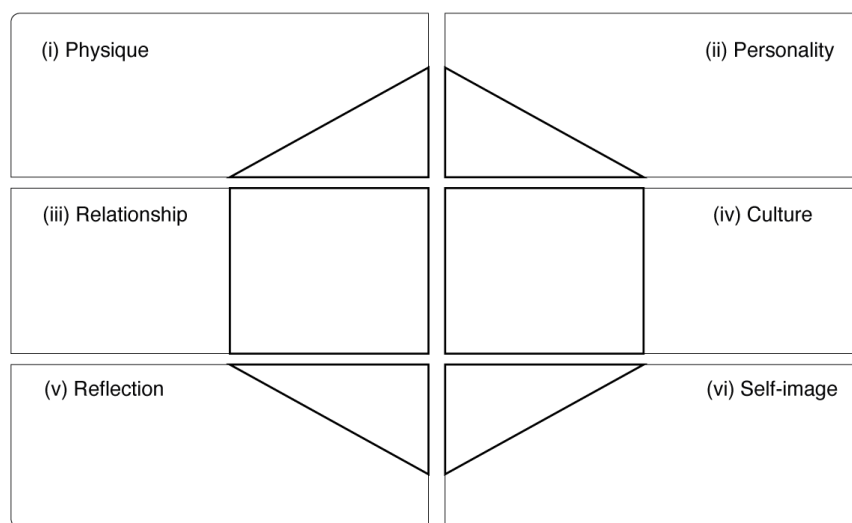


Figure 6: Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism (2009)

- i) Physique is the way a brand presents itself externally (visual of physical appearance including shapes, color, text, logo);
- ii) Personality is the way the brand communicates itself to others, what are their values how and how they have chosen to be communicated to others;
- iii) Culture represents the fundamental values of the brand, its mission, and vision on which the brand's behavior is based;
- iv) The relationship is the external core values, meaning what the customers aim to receive from using the brand besides from the product itself.
- v) Reflection is how the company sees their ideal customer;
- vi) Self-image is the way the customers see themselves, their own values, and who they are as a person.

By breaking down these facets, one can go under the surface of what a brand really is, besides a name and a logo to represent a product, service, or entity. According to Kapferer (2002), the Brand Identity Prism aims to clarify the reason for the existence of the brand, what it intends to create in the market (relationship), what it tries to contribute (physique) conducted by what “why” (culture).

In sum, brand identity is how a brand perceives itself and how it wants to be perceived by its target audience. It includes visible elements of the brand and indicates the company's reality. Brand identity is formed on the basis of the way a company seeks to identify itself with. It is based on the internal stakeholders' perception of the brand and how it presents itself to the outside world.

### **3.2. Relationship Marketing**

As referred to above, at the beginning of the 20th century, markets were mostly local, and brands marketed themselves through product differentiation and consumer needs. There was no need to exchange ideas with their audience, because demand was higher than

supply, and therefore financial success was often guaranteed. Since the globalization of technology, there has been a significant change from transaction-oriented marketing to relationship-oriented marketing. The founding principle of this shift was the realization that business, just like society, is a network of relationships. As humans, we naturally form connections with others through associations (Gummesson, 2002: 9-10). These connections can evolve into long-term friendships and can contribute to the genesis of business relationships. The focus of relationship marketing is to contradict the impersonal marketing management way of thinking and handling business (Gummesson, 2002: 10):

“Within the current marketing management mode of thinking, much of marketing is reduced to impersonal exchange through mass production and mass distribution. The manufacturer offers products and services via an intermediary and the consumer offers money. The manufacturer and retailers are no more than trademarks, they may even be totally anonymous to the consumer, who in turn is just a statistic. This approach of marketing does not comply with the reality of society.”

The author then adds that relationship marketing aims to contradict this way of making it into the market by focusing on the individual and affinity groups (groups of like-minded people). These affinity groups are composed of people that have a common interest (or stake) and may want or be open to a relationship with the supplier and even with each other. Gummesson (2002: 10) states these groups form communities, and these communities can originate and revolve around a brand.

Grönroos (1996) defends that a strategy directed towards core competencies and resources as the foundation for lucrative market relationships, emphasizes what firms can do for customers via a total service offering. Instead of what they can do to customers with product offerings or technologies via a transactional marketing mix management approach. The author then illustrates this shift from transaction-oriented marketing to relationship-oriented marketing:



Figure 7: Grönroos product-oriented marketing perspective: a transaction marketing approach (1996: 7)

In the figure above, the three critical parties in marketing are depicted in a transactional approach. These are the organization's marketing and/or sales departments, the market, and the product. Marketing is the duty of a specialized department. Customers are considered segments of more or less anonymous individuals or companies' markets. The offering is heavily weighted toward items, goods, and services. Three other critical components of marketing are illustrated along the triangle's sides: making promises through external marketing (often mass marketing) and sales, keeping promises through product features, and preparing for promise fulfillment through continual product development. The concept of marketing as a series of activities aimed at making and keeping promises is not explicitly stated in the transactional marketing literature, most likely because it is assumed that products are developed with sufficient features to ensure that any promises are made by external marketing and sales are kept.

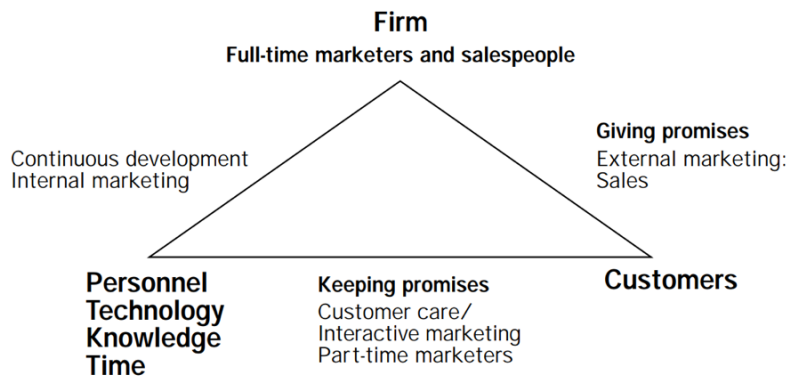


Figure 8: Grönroos resource-oriented marketing perspective: a relationship marketing approach (1996: 7)

In this second figure, which shows the current market condition for an ever-increasing number of organizations, the majority of the elements are clearly different. While the firm may retain a centralized marketing and sales staff, referred to as full-time marketers, they may not represent all of the firm's personnel to perform these tasks. Markets as combinations of mostly anonymous individuals or collectives are no longer depicted. Customers, prefer to be served on a much more personal level. In principle, no customer must remain anonymous to the business. Finally, the product vanished. While service businesses do not have products in the traditional, well-defined, and packaged sense of the marketing mix, they do have a collection of resources and, in the best-case scenario, a well-planned means of utilizing these resources in the way that is most convenient for the audience. A similar trend is presently occurring for suppliers who do business with organizational purchasers and users. Thus, regardless of the type of industry in which the firm operates, it must be able to manage essential resources effectively in order to build a successful complete offering.

Relationship marketing usually refers only to the relationship between an organization or brand and its customers. However, recent studies have been trying to open up a rather narrow focus on customers, moving toward a more holistic view of marketing that involves all stakeholders and their interrelationships. Hillebrand, H. Driessen, and Koll (2014: 412) name this approach stakeholder marketing. According to the authors, it recognizes that customer relationships may be influenced by relationships with other stakeholders and that a diverse network of stakeholders creates value (as stated by Gummesson, 2008). Kotler adds that “marketing is a relevant subject for all organizations in their relations with all their publics, not only customers” (Kotler, 1972: 47) Relational (or relationship) marketing is an approach for including and engaging consumers, suppliers, and other infrastructure in the institution's development and marketing activities. According to Morgan & Hunt (2004: 20):

“Relationship marketing refers to all marketing activities directed toward establishing, developing, and maintaining relational successful exchange. That is marketing leads to overall marketing activities directed through the formation, development, and successfully maintaining exchange relations.”

For Kotler and Keller (2016: 35), relationship marketing aims to establish long-term, mutually satisfying relationships with its key constituents in order to win and/or maintain business with them. The four pillars of relationship marketing, according to Kotler and Keller, are clients, employees, marketing partners (fournisseurs, distributors, vendors, agencies), and members of the financial community (shareholders, investors, analysts). The symbiotic relationship between these entities is referred to by the authors as a "marketing network", whose goal is to build and reinforce fruitful relationships with a company's stakeholders. Grönroos (1996: 8) defines relationship marketing as: "Marketing is to manage the firm's market relationships." As a result, marketing is defined as a practice based on the relationships that exist between a company and its surroundings.

The author then identifies three strategic issues and three tactical ones of relationship marketing strategy identified. The strategic issues are: 1) Defining the firm as a service business, as customers expect a much more collaborative service offering that encompasses everything from instruction on how to use a product safely and effectively to delivering, installing, updating, repairing, maintaining, and correcting solutions they have purchased. In a relationship with a customer that extends beyond a single transaction involving a product, the product as a technical solution involving goods, services, or industrial equipment becomes just one component of the total, ongoing service offering. In today's competitive environment, a manufacturer's physical good is very rarely sufficient to generate better outcomes and a sustained market position. What matters is a firm's ability to manage the additional elements of its total offering better than competitors, regardless of its distribution channel position (Grönroos, 1996: 9); 2) Managing the firm from a process management perspective, requiring an ongoing relationship with customers, in which people require value in the total service offering. For this, internal collaboration among the departments responsible for the various aspects of the service. Such as the core product

itself, advertising the product, delivering the product, handling complaints and recovering errors and quality faults, maintaining the product, billing routines, product documentation, and so on. The entire sequence of activities must be coordinated and managed as a single integrated process. Traditional departmental boundaries are dismantled, and the workflow, which includes traditional sales and marketing activities, productive, administrative, and distributive activities, as well as a variety of part-time marketing activities, is organized and managed as value-creating processes that facilitate and strengthen relationship building and management (Grönroos, 1996: 9); 3) Developing partnerships and networks, because relationship marketing is based on cooperation rather than conflict, firms will not view one another as adversarial, but rather as partners in a win-win situation. The paradox of relationship marketing is that being an effective competitor in an era of network competition also requires being an effective collaborator.

As for the three tactical issues of relationship marketing strategy, the first is seeking direct contact with customers, as relationship marketing is predicated on the concept of trustworthy collaboration with known customers. As a result, businesses must develop a much deeper understanding of their customers than is currently the case. Manufacturers and retailers should develop systems that allow them to gather as much customer data as possible so that advertising campaigns, sales contacts, and customer service interactions can be as relationship-oriented as possible. Making the most use of available face-to-face contact with customers, as well as the tools provided by information technology, in order to get as close to the customers as possible (Grönroos, 1996: 11); the second is building a database, a well-prepared, up-to-date, easily retrievable, and easy-to-read client information file is required to enable the employee to pursue relationship-oriented customer engagement. Additionally, a solid database will serve as an excellent tool for cross-selling and developing new product offerings. In addition to their primary purpose of maintaining customer relationships, databases could be used for a variety of marketing activities, including segmenting the customer base, customizing marketing activities, creating profiles of customer types, assisting with service activities, and identifying high-likelihood

purchasers (Grönroos, 1996: 11), and thirdly developing a customer-oriented service system. Four types of resources are central to the development of a successful service system; employees, technology, customers, and time. The perceived quality of the service offering depends partly on the impact of the customer (Brand Image). The service system is, to a growing extent, built on technology. Computerized systems and information technology used in design, production, administration, service, and maintenance have to be designed from a customer-service perspective, and not only or mainly from internal production and productivity-oriented viewpoints. The success of relationship marketing is, to a large extent, dependent on the attitudes, commitment, and performance of the employees. Time is also a critical resource to manage. Customers have to feel that the time they spend in the relationship with a supplier or service firm is not wasted. Badly managed time creates extra costs for all parties in a relationship (Grönroos, 1996: 11-12).

In sum, the goal of relationship marketing is to develop mutually satisfying long-term relationships between a company and its stakeholders: customers, suppliers, and distributors. (Kotler and Keller, 2013). Relational marketing is the natural evolution of (product-based) transactional marketing, being a holistic approach to relating companies and their stakeholders, in a collaborative service strategy.

### **3.2.2. Alliances**

As discussed above, one of the foundations of relationship marketing is based on developing partnerships and networks with the goal of mutual benefit. Relationships between competitors, or competing entities are referred to as alliances. According to Gummesson (2002: 157), alliances exist above market relationships and day-to-day marketing actions. It represents an organized and voluntary relationship between entities that have a common goal. When this common interest arises, there are two options: competition or collaboration. The second usually translates into alliances that “vary in intensity and duration: they can be one-shot projects; imply limited but continuous

collaboration; or take the parties so close that they may lead to a merger or acquisition” (Gummesson, 2002: 157, 158). This relationship operates at a corporate strategy level. The author makes clear that collaboration is not a new concept as it is a natural happening in buying and selling. One can differentiate alliances from just collaborations when the relationship is planned for longevity, for the improvement, development, and benefit of multiple parties. Outsourcing and imaginary organizations take place. This approach is different from the market for matrimony (Gummesson, 2002: 159) because polygamy is recommended. Trust is an essential factor in order for alliances of two company cultures to prevail. “Alliances must be a win-win, parties seeing each other as equals, as partners” (Gummesson, 2002: 160) as all entities in the alliance must have an equal stake. According to the author, alliances make for a complex network of relationships that “create multifaceted interaction patterns between buyers, sellers, and others”. Relationship marketing can help to guide and manage the challenges originating from these complex networks, but states that competitiveness and collaboration are both equally needed to sustain the market balance (Gummesson 2002: 162).

It is relevant for this research to discuss this relationship for it is crucial to differentiate alliance for collaboration. These differ in intensity and duration, and each requires different stakes and strategies.

### **3.2.3. The Green Relationship**

Gummesson (2002) in his book “Total Relationship Marketing”, makes reference to several types of relationships. Namely, what the author names “The Green Relationship”. This type of relationship between companies, suppliers, consumers, and society (amongst whom, is its environment) is based on ethics and good citizenship (Gummesson, 2002: 122). Cause-related marketing and green marketing are now often associated with public relations and the purpose of boosting the brand’s image. As marketing “as a discipline is primarily dealing with issues of a micro and short-term character. Companies endeavor to maintain

long-term profitability and survival, but in practice, short-term considerations are given a priority.” (Gummesson, 2002: 124) However, when a company understands that, in order to thrive in the long term, it must contribute to a world where that possibility exists. The way a company deals with environmental and health issues depends on what drives the firm. A law-driven firm has a defensive strategy when it comes to dealing with these subjects. They are considered costs to be avoided as consumers do not really care. There is resistance within the company and external pressure towards addressing these issues constitutes a threat. Law-driven firms prefer to let the justice system decide who the good citizens are. Public relations-driven firms take this green relationship strategy as an opportunity for image enhancement. Consumers want it, so brands usually take advantage and start greenwashing their marketing actions. The efforts of the public relations-driven company are aimed at being perceived as a good citizen. Value-driven firms, on the other hand, thrive when dealing with health and environmental issues. They take as an offensive strategy as green relationships usually represent a basis for revenue. Its consumers demand it from them as they expect more from the brand (sometimes associated with consumers being willing to pay a higher price for its products or services if this expectation is met). For value-driven firms, green relationships are inherent in their business mission and represent an opportunity to sustain a competitive advantage. In this case, a genuine desire to be a good citizen actually exists (Gummesson, 2002: 124).

The green relationship is addressed in this research to separate itself from the greenwashing stereotype/assumption that most brands have been recently taking advantage of. As reviewed above, what ensures credibility are the values that drive the company, the consistency of their environmental and health actions, and the expectations of customers.

### **3.3. Stakeholder Theory**

In order to fully grasp the concept of stakeholder theory, one must first clarify the concept of stakeholder definition and identification. Secondly, stakeholder engagement will be explored and models will be presented.

### **3.3.1. Stakeholder Definition**

All organizations are social enterprises, therefore being constituted out of people that depend on the organization and on whom the organization depends as well. These are named stakeholders, those who have a stake in the actions of the corporation. A stakeholder can be described as “those groups without whose support the organization would cease to exist” (cited in Freeman and Reed, 1983: 89; Freeman, 1984: 31 and Mitchell et al, 1997: 858) as referring to a 1963 internal memo report from the Stanford Research Institute. Tompson et al. (1991: 209) refer to a stakeholder as someone in “relationship with the organization.” The more general definition, on which this research will be based is Brenner’s (1995) on which it is stated that stakeholders are those that "are or which could impact or be impacted by the firm/organization" (Brenner, 1995: 7). Carroll, A. B., & Buchholtz, A. K. (2014: 72) define stakeholders as a singular person or a collective that has one or several stakes in an organization, meaning “(...) stakeholders have a stake in the “value” they expect to receive from firms with which they interact.” These stakes can be an interest, a right (legal or moral), or ownership type.

Reviewed literature states that a more specific definition of stakeholders is useful to manage their concerns and well-being, proposing two definitions: a wide sense and a narrow sense. The first definition regards any individual or collective and can affect the organization’s achievements or be affected by them; whereas the second, narrow sense of stakeholder, can be summarized as any individual or collective on whom the organization depends for its continuity (Freeman and Reed, 1983).

### **3.3.2. Stakeholder Identification and Approach**

Identification and approach to stakeholders are central to stakeholder theory, and over time, there were different contributions to help shed light on this task. One identification method

is a differentiation between primary or secondary stakeholders, as referred to in numerous scholars' works (Clarkson, 1995; Freeman, 1984, Freeman et al. 2010). Primary stakeholders are namely shareholders, investors, employees, customers, suppliers, the public stakeholder group, the government, and the communities, and can be defined as a group "without whose continuing participation the corporation cannot survive as a going concern" (Clarkson, 1995: 106). The same author describes secondary stakeholder groups as those who have an impact or an effect on, or are influenced or affected by, the corporation but are not involved in its operations or are not necessary for its existence. Freeman was one of the first authors to recognize some of the external stakeholders as such, contrary to the most settled stakeholder definition, including only shareholders, customers, employees, and suppliers.

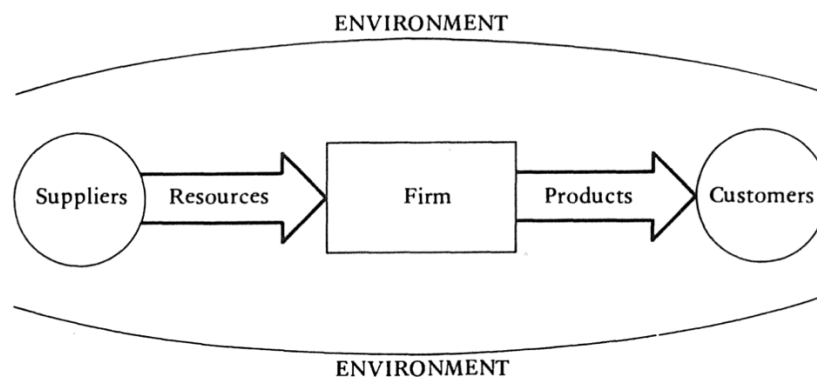


Figure 9: Production View of the Firm (Freeman, 2010: 5)

The author then presents a simplified map, taking into account those “that can affect or be affected by the accomplishment of the organizational purpose.” (Freeman, 2010: 25) He explains that every category of the stated stakeholders can be divided into smaller more specific categories for not all employees nor competitors, per example, are alike.

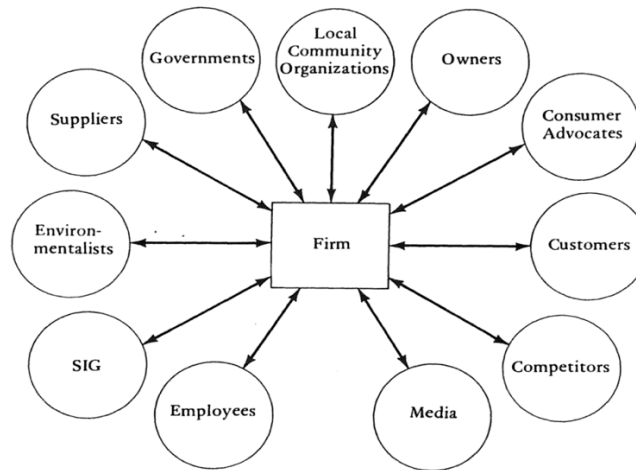


Figure 10: Stakeholder's View of the Firm (Freeman, 2010: 25)

Research has shown that if a company wants to develop its business, as well as its social and community acceptance and the quality of its human resources, it must consider what the corporate brand should imply in the long run to its numerous stakeholders and audiences (Kapferer, 1991). By breaking down the categories in a more precise way, one can have a firmer grasp on the management of these entities, which is why Freeman's (1984) and Freeman et al. (2010) ideas are so relevant.

In 1997, Mitchell, Agle and Wood gathered, according to previous literature, a series of stakeholder identification' sorting rationales including: An existent relationship, in which the firm and its stakeholders exercise a voice with respect to the firm; a power dependence in which the stakeholder is dominant, meaning that the firm is dependent on the stakeholder that has power over the firm; a power dependence in which the firm is dominant, this rationale implies the stakeholder is dependent on the firm or that the firm has power over the stakeholder; a mutual power-dependence relationship in which the firm and stakeholder are mutually dependent; there is a basis for legitimacy of the relationship, including for example that the firm and stakeholder are in contractual relationship, the stakeholder has a claim on the firm, the stakeholder has something at risk or the stakeholder has a moral claim on the firm; and lastly including stakeholder interests (in which legitimacy is not implied), where the stakeholder has an interest in the firm (Mitchell et al, 1997: 860-862).

From the information gathered from these rationales, the authors presented an even more extensive stakeholder definition model, named the stakeholder salience model. In this model, stakeholders are divided into three attributes in order to identify, classify, and prioritize stakeholder relationships: power, legitimacy, and urgency. (Mitchell et al, 1997: 872). The first attribute is power, meaning the stakeholder (individual or collective) has power over the organization. “A party to a relationship has power, to the extent it has or can gain access to coercive, utilitarian, or normative means, to impose its will in the relationship” (Mitchell et al, 1997: 865).

The second attribute is legitimacy, the stakeholder’s claims have legitimacy upon the organization. The authors utilize Suchman's (1995) definition of legitimacy, stating it is "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (Suchman, 1995: 57 as cited by Mitchell et al, 1997: 866).

The third and final attribute is urgency. The authors justify the use of the urgency factor in order to add motion to the model. That is, it evolves and changes in response to the third class of stakeholder identification, becoming dynamic in nature. It is defined as "the degree to which stakeholder claims call for immediate attention" (Mitchell et al., 1997: 864). This urgency is dependent on both external and internal factors, meaning that all groups can gain or lose attributes. This classification is what distinguishes the criticality of addressing all different stakeholders (Mitchell et al., 1997: 866).

This model, composed of the three attributes and correspondent definitions presented above, evolved into the differentiation of seven types of stakeholders: Dormant, Discretionary, Demanding, Dominant, Dependent, Dangerous, and Definitive. These vary within the three attributes, in terms of lack, absence, as well as degree. The

seven types, as well as the attributes they are dependent on, are presented in figure 5, as well as a small definition of each:

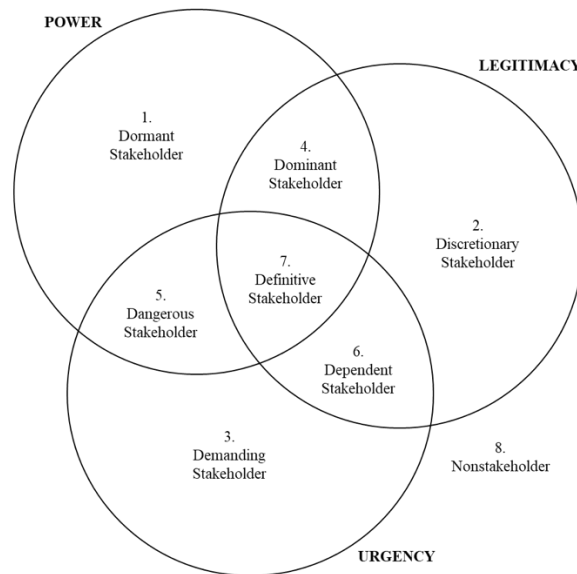


Figure 11: Qualitative Stakeholder Typology (Mitchell, Agle, and Wood,1997: 874)

- (1) Dormant Stakeholders. They have the ability to enforce their will through coercive, utilitarian, or symbolic means, but they have little or no interaction/involvement since they lack legitimacy or urgency (Mitchell et al, 1997: 874).
  
- (2) Discretionary Stakeholders. Those who are likely to benefit from corporate philanthropy. There is absolutely no requirement for managers to interact with this group, but they may do so. Beneficiaries of charity are an example of urgency (Mitchell et al, 1997: 875).
  
- (3) Demanding Stakeholders. Those who have urgent legitimate concerns but lack legitimacy or power. Management concerns, but not worth

considering. People with unwarranted grudges, recurrent complainers, or low return customers, for example (Mitchell et al, 1997: 875).

- (4) Dominant Stakeholders. Likely to have formal mechanisms in place to acknowledge the link with the organization or project. Examples as boards of directors, HR departments, and public relations departments (Mitchell et al, 1997: 876).
- (5) Dangerous Stakeholders. Those with strong and urgent claims will use coercion and, in some cases, violence. For example, staff sabotage or activists' coercive/illegal techniques (Mitchell et al, 1997: 876).
- (6) Dependent Stakeholders. Due to the lack of capacity to enforce their stake, these are reliant on others to carry out their wishes. They can become definitive stakeholders if dominant stakeholders advocate for them (Mitchell et al, 1997: 877).
- (7) Definitive Stakeholders. Stakeholders who make a difference, have legitimacy, power, and urgency. Often, dominant stakeholders with an urgent need. or dominant stakeholders with powerful legal help. Those who have been labeled as dangerous may finally earn legitimacy and become definitive stakeholders. An example is shareholders (Mitchell et al, 1997: 878).

Elias, Cavana, and Jackson (2002) provided a process for systematically identifying stakeholders and their interests in an R&D project by combining Freeman's and Mitchell's, Agle, and Wood's recommendations. The 8 steps of the process are:

1. Develop a stakeholder map of the project.

Stakeholder analysis for an R&D project should begin with the creation of a stakeholder map, taking into account all stakeholders that can impact or be impacted by the project:

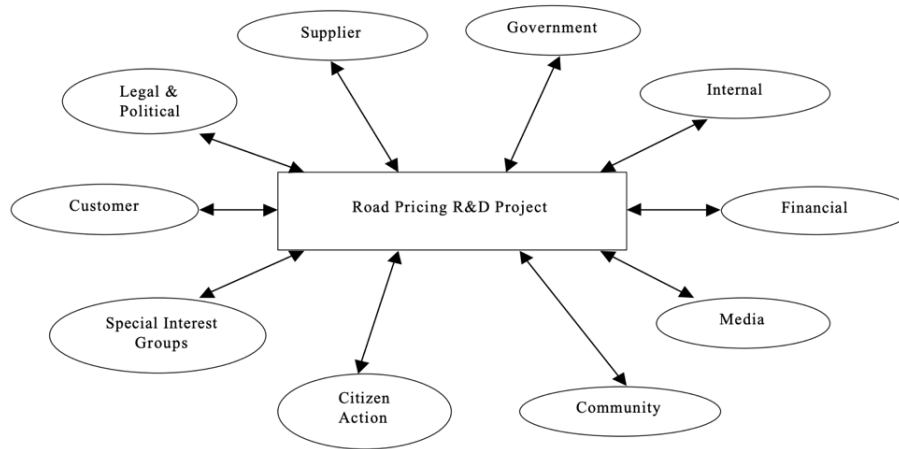


Figure 12: A stakeholder map of the road pricing R&D project (Elias, Cavana, Jackson, 2002 : 305).

2. Prepare a Chart of specific stakeholders (previously identified in the map).
3. Identify the stakes of stakeholders.
4. Prepare a power versus stake grid (a two-dimensional grid in which the first dimension categorizes the stakeholders by stake and the second dimension by power).
5. Conduct a process-level stakeholder analysis.
6. Conduct a transactional level stakeholder analysis to comprehend the series of transactions or agreements between project management and its stakeholders, and determine whether these agreements are compatible with the stakeholder map and organizational processes for stakeholders. Understanding the legitimacy of the stakeholder and having systems in place to routinely surface their concerns are the foundations of successful transactions with stakeholders.
7. Determine the stakeholder management capability of the project by understanding or conceptual map of its stakeholders, as well as the methods for interacting with them and the transactions it employs to achieve the project's goals with them (Freeman, 1984). To assess

stakeholder management competency, we must first identify whether project management is aware of its stakeholder map. The R&D project's organizational procedure and transactions for dealing with its stakeholders must then be rated.

8. Analyze the dynamics of stakeholders, their attitudes toward the project, as well as the importance of stakeholders in the eyes of project managers, shift throughout time. The stakeholder analysis of a particular project will be enhanced by considering this dynamic of stakeholders. This typology model should be updated on a regular basis to reflect the changing importance of stakeholders, and one can use the Stakeholder Salience Model presented above, to achieve this.

Project leaders are utilizing this approach to standardize the link between a new stakeholder's identification and the description of their expectations, as well as their bargaining power with other stakeholders.

Carroll, A. B., & Buchholtz, A. K. (2014: 76) also provide clear identification of types of stakeholders, differentiating primary and secondary social stakeholders as well as primary and secondary nonsocial stakeholders. According to the authors, primary social stakeholders have a direct claim on the organization's performance (including shareholders and investors, employees and managers, customers, local communities, suppliers, and other business partners). Secondary social stakeholders may be influential, but have a more indirect or derivative stake in the organization (some examples are the government and regulators, civic institutions, social pressure/activist groups, media, and academic commentators, trade bodies, and competitors). Primary nonsocial stakeholders include natural environments, future generations, and non-human species. Secondary nonsocial stakeholders include those who advocate for them or speak on their behalf (such as environmental interest groups and animal welfare organizations). Carroll, A. B., & Buchholtz, A. K. (2014) conclude these statements with the note that secondary stakeholders can become primary according to the urgency of the claim (in accordance to

Mitchell, Agle, and Wood's 1997 theory) which, with today's fast-spreading communication and social media, can change in just minutes.

The way in which stakeholders are taken into account and later addressed depends on the stakeholder approach used. (Carroll, A. B., and A. K. Buchholtz, 2014: 79) The strategic approach, the multifiduciary approach, and the stakeholder synthesis method are three revolutionary approaches proposed by Kenneth Goodpaster in 1991. According to his research, in the strategic approach, stakeholders are largely seen as aspects to be considered and handled while the corporation pursues profits for its shareholders. In the multifiduciary approach, they are seen as more than just people or groups with economic or legal power. Under this viewpoint, stakeholders are owed a fiduciary duty in the same way that shareholders are. Stakeholder synthesis is innovative and often chosen as the most appropriate one to be used because it recognizes that businesses have moral responsibilities to stakeholders, but that these commitments should not be viewed as fiduciary obligations. Meaning, management's fundamental fiduciary obligation to shareholders is preserved, but it is also required to be applied in the context of ethical responsibility to other stakeholders (Goodpaster, 1991). This last approach implies that the organization is using stakeholder management for other reasons than just being a better way to manage, namely ethical or collaborative grounds.

Carroll, A. B., & Buchholtz, A. K. (2014) present five crucial questions to be answered to gather the information needed for successful stakeholder management:

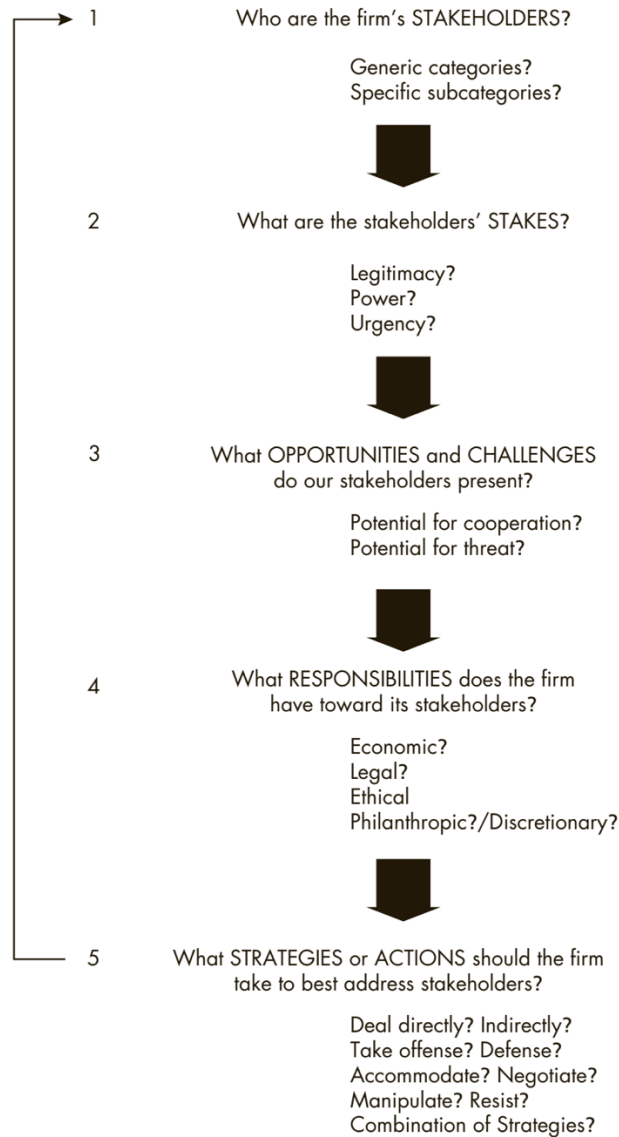


Figure 13: 5 key Questions of Stakeholder Management Carroll, A. B., & Buchholtz, A. K., 2014 : 81

From the authors' description, it is valuable for this specific research to highlight question 3, regarding the potential for cooperation or threat. In terms of potential for collaboration, the company must be aware of the prospect of collaborating with stakeholders for the mutual benefit of all parties concerned. Carroll and Buchholtz (2014) compile research from multiple academic authors, amongst whom are Savage, Grant T., Nix, Timothy W.,

Whitehead, Carlton J., and Blair, John D. (1991) research: "Strategies for assessing and managing organizational stakeholders", *The Academy of Management Executives*, 5(2), pp. 61-75, in order to create a visual stakeholder analysis and recommend strategies and actions. They divide stakeholders into four types: Supportive, Marginal, Non-Supportive and Mixed-Blessing Stakeholders.

Supportive Stakeholders are referred to by the authors as the ideal stakeholders. Supportive Stakeholders have a high potential for cooperation and a low potential for threat. These might include the board of directors, managers, employees, loyal customers, suppliers, and service providers. The suggested strategy with Supportive Stakeholders is involvement, such as the engagement of employees or collaborative entities through participative management.

Marginal Stakeholders are those that provide a low potential for both threat and cooperation. An example of this type of stakeholder is inactive consumer interest groups or shareholders that hold few shares. The advised strategy, in this case, is to monitor them, to keep the situation as is, or be aware of any changes taking place.

Non-supportive is high on threat potential and low on cooperation (also referred to as Dangerous Stakeholders by Mitchell et al, 1997). Competing organizations, unions, federal or other levels of government, and the media are all examples of this type. The authors' recommended strategy is to be prepared, defend or guard against and negotiate with these types of stakeholders.

Mixed-Blessing stakeholders have a high potential for both threat and cooperation. This type of stakeholder includes employees, customers, or clients. A Mixed-Blessing Stakeholder can become a Supportive or Non-Supportive one, depending on the circumstances. The proposed strategy is collaboration. Through boosting collaboration, the chances of this stakeholder remaining supportive are increased. Many organizations are

viewing Non-Supportive types of stakeholders and considering them Mixed-Blessings. For instance, by forming coalitions with environmentalists and sustainability advocates, mutual benefits can be created, converting them into allies.

Stakeholder Type	Examples of Stakeholder Type	Stakeholder Potential for Threat	Stakeholder Potential for Cooperation	Strategy/Action Recommended
Supportive Stakeholder	Board of directors, some employees	Low	High	Involve; take offense, accommodate, proact; keep satisfied
Marginal Stakeholder	Professional associations, interest groups	Low	Low	Monitor; watch carefully; minimal effort; offense or defense
Nonsupportive Stakeholder	Competitors, unions, governments, some activist groups	High	Low	Defend; be prepared; guard against; negotiate
Mixed-Blessing Stakeholder	Employees, clients, customers	High	Medium-to-High	Collaborate; take offense, partnership, pool resources; keep informed

Figure 14: Stakeholder Analysis and Recommended, Strategies and Actions (Carroll, A. B., & Buchholtz, A. K., 2014: 89)

By identifying the stakeholders and organizing them according to their nature, urgency, legitimacy, power, and type, one can understand who needs their claims answered the most, who can cooperate with the organization or put it at risk, etc. It is crucial to know who is to be addressed and in what way they should be managed. Before delving into the concept of Stakeholder Engagement, we'll discuss the three progressively advanced degrees of stakeholder management below.

**3.3.3. Stakeholder Engagement**

Before delving into the concept of Stakeholder Engagement, we'll discuss the three progressively advanced degrees of stakeholder management below.

The capability of an organization to integrate stakeholder thinking into its operations is referred to as stakeholder management capability, and it might take place at one of three degrees of increasing sophistication: rational, process, or transactional (Carroll, A. B., & Buchholtz, A. K. 2014).

Level 1, The "Rational" level: Stakeholder maps. Stakeholder Management Capability on a rational level also referred to as the familiarization and comprehensiveness factor requires the company to determine who their stakeholders are and what their stakes are. This is the level at which management should develop a stakeholder map. At this level, an attempt to become acquainted with their stakeholders and to produce a comprehensive assessment of their identity and stakes are made.

Level 2, The "Process" level: Environmental scanning. This second level has been dubbed planning imperativeness, as an organization must do place an emphasis on developing processes for stakeholders and incorporating stakeholder considerations into organizational decision-making. At the process level, companies advance beyond Level 1 by developing and implementing processes—approaches, procedures, rules, and practices—that enable the firm to scan the environment and collect pertinent information about stakeholders for decision-making purposes.

Level 3, The "Transactional" level: Interacting with stakeholders. Level 3 is the ultimate goal of stakeholder management—the extent to which managers participate in transactions with stakeholders (relationships). At the transactional level, actual negotiations with stakeholders may be necessary (involving the organization's management to take the initiative in meeting stakeholders face to face and seeking to address their requirements). Level 3 is the communication level, which is defined by proactive communication, interactive communication, authentic communication, frequency, satisfaction, and resource sufficiency.

To achieve Level 3 of the stakeholder management capability, organizations have been turning to the approach of stakeholder engagement. (Carroll, A. B., & Buchholtz, A. K. 2014) Stakeholder engagement, according to Bourne (2009), is the "practices, processes, and actions that an organization must undertake to engage stakeholders in any organizational activity in order to gain their involvement and commitment or to lessen their indifference or hostility" (Bourne, 2009: 93). In order to question the responsible aspect of this approach, Greenwood (2007) gathers several definitions of stakeholder management, as

well as the effects it conducts to. The author differentiates the many forms of putting in place this method, being the most relevant ones to this analysis: Stakeholder engagement as a form of participation, allowing stakeholders to participate in the firm (Arnstein, 1969); Fairness Cooperation Accountability, enhancing trust-based cooperation (Peccei and Guest, 2002), Strategic management, managing the firm in response to the interests of the stakeholders (Freeman, 1984); Continuous learning, involving stakeholders so that the company can continuously learn and improve, (Sillanpaa, 1998); Social construction, constructing an image of the firm (Livesey and Kearins, 2002).

Brands that recognize the value of actively developing and maintaining relationships with involved external stakeholders throughout the life of their project, not just during the initial feasibility and assessment phase, benefit from better risk management and improved outcomes on the ground. (Sequeira and Warner, 2007: 1) The authors enunciate stages of stakeholder engagement according to intensity: Communication Strategies, Information Disclosure, Consultation, Participation, and lastly Negotiation and Partnerships.

Stakeholder engagement can be divided into a ladder of three levels, lower, middle and higher. At a lower level could be used for informing and explaining. Approaches at this level might include news coverage, publications, or reports. At the middle level of participation, communication would take the shape of conferences, social media, bulk e-mails, newsletters, or surveys. Stakeholder engagement at a higher degree could be the result of proactive or reactive efforts to involve stakeholders in company decision-making. At the highest level, words like involvement, cooperation, partnership, or joint venture could be used to describe the high-priority relationship that has been established. (Carroll, A. B., & Buchholtz, A. K., 2014). The authors also state that this highest level exemplified could be “(...) when a firm enters into a strategic alliance with a stakeholder group to seek the group’s opinion of a product design that would be sensitive to the group’s concerns, such as environmental impact, employee safety, or product safety. (Carroll, A. B., & Buchholtz, A. K., 2014: 93)

The chosen model for this research is Sequeira and Warner's (2007:11) construct for good stakeholder engagement. Also referred to as the building blocks of stakeholder engagement, they consist of eight components:

**Stakeholder Identification and Analysis.** Companies should spend time identifying stakeholders and analyzing their stakes and needs, such as taking into consideration their interests and concerns.

**Information Disclosure.** Information should be communicated to stakeholders, early on in the project and throughout its duration, as a way of involving them in the decision-making process to produce inclusive, meaningful, and adapted solutions.

**Stakeholder Consultation.** Sit-down consultation with stakeholders should be planned out, documented, communicated, and followed up. Consultation key questions to be considered include: What are the strategic justifications for consulting stakeholders during this phase of the project? Are there any consultation requirements that must be met at this stage of the process? Who are the critical stakeholder groups to consult during this phase of the project? Are there any high-risk populations or issues that require extra attention at this stage? Which communication techniques and methods will be most effective in reaching out to the various stakeholder groups? Who is accountable for what activities within the company (or outside the company)? How will the process's outcomes be documented, tracked, and communicated? (Sequeira and Warner, 2007: 35 - 36)

**Negotiation and Partnerships.** Strategic partnerships that fulfill the interests of all parties. This is a key point to create value and, as mentioned prior, it is an example of the highest intensity of stakeholder engagement.

Grievance Management. Capacity to receive, document, and address stakeholders' afflictions and concerns about a project or topic, and through the entire lifespan of the action at stake.

Stakeholder Involvement in Project Monitoring. Involving internal stakeholders in what is taking place is crucial for uniformity, "team spirit", vision definition, and value creation. External stakeholders' involvement augments transparency and credibility. Affected stakeholders consider themselves seen as well as their opinion heard and held valuable.

Reporting to Stakeholders. Keeping consulted and general, but relevant, stakeholders up to date on environmental, social, and economic performances of the project.

Management Functions. Treating stakeholder engagement as a project to be managed, with tracks, milestones, and progress reports.

Organizations are composed of different stakeholders that affect or are affected by the organizations' decisions and goals. These stakeholders can be defined as primary (if without their participation, the company would cease to exist) or secondary (those that influence and are influenced by the company, but are not essential for its survival) (Clarkson, 1995). To successfully manage stakeholders and elaborate on effective and satisfying symbiotic relationships, many steps have to be taken. These include identifying who they are and categorizing them based on the nature, urgency, legitimacy, and power of their claim, as well as their social and collaborative potential. levels of interaction and/or engagement with them, as well as the most effective way to carry out these approaches according to each stakeholder and organization's needs, expectations, and goals. In all of these steps, communication and empathy are key in enabling common ground and mutual understanding. The more broad the organization is, the stronger its identity and empathy have to be in order to relate to its stakeholders while remaining vision-oriented and true to its core essence.

### **3.3.4. Relationship Marketing, Brand Image, Brand Identity and the Role of Stakeholders**

In response to expanding global markets, the use of new information and communication technologies, marketing interest in relationship-based strategic methods has risen dramatically over the last decade. The importance of long-term relationships with customers and other stakeholders has been largely overlooked in mainstream marketing literature, but it is recognized in the relationship marketing literature (Payne, Ballantyne, and Christopher, 2004). Popoli (2001: 426) states "brand image is influenced by positive or negative opinions of stakeholders on the degree of social responsibility demonstrated by the company." He also states that brand image can be positively transferred by values, strategies, and competence in the premise of satisfying stakeholders' expectations. In a well-branded organization, internal brand awareness is usually strong. Meaning, for example, that workers are usually quite conscious of the brand for which they work (Jones, 2017). People are often driven to work in a well-branded, well-positioned brand that reflects their views and values. When the Identity of the Brand is properly established, employees work towards the same goal.

“Branding can make people feel more positive, more ‘engaged’, to use the management jargon—and in fact there’s a whole sub-set of branding called ‘employer branding’. The result is that there’s less effort to hire people, fewer mistakes in hiring, more productive workers, less wasted effort, less internal conflict or duplication of work.”

(Jones, 2017: 173)

Sequeira and Warner (2007) state that several aspects of good relationships – trust, mutual respect, and understanding – are impalpable that grow and develop over time, depending on the individual and interpersonal circumstances and collective synergies and experiences. Even though relationship marketing is often focused only on customer relationships, it has evolved to a more stakeholder-based approach. In order to provide effective results, stakeholder engagement should be guided by a well-defined strategy and include a well-defined set of objectives, timeline, budget, and responsibility allocation. For the stakeholder engagement strategy to be in line with the purpose and vision of the company, all

employees should be informed about the program and understand why it is being implemented and the potential consequences for project outcomes. Direct reporting lines and senior management engagement, for example, are essential. (Sequeira and Warner, 2007: 8) Meaning that if the internal stakeholders are to be involved and aware of the strategy, they are also involved stakeholders on its becoming.

### **3.4. Design Thinking**

In this chapter, I will dwell on the definition of design thinking. Firstly, the definition of the term "design" will be compared to the term "design thinking", and the differences between both will be discussed. Then I will elaborate on the concept of design thinking, dividing it into two components: ideology (what it is, what it stands for, and how it is being used) and methodology (concrete steps and methods used by design thinkers). Then I will connect design thinking to branding, marketing, and stakeholder theory according to the reviewed literature and semi-structured expert interviews done for this research.

#### **3.4.1. Design and Design Thinking**

A generally accepted definition of design has yet to emerge. Most authors define it according to their own vision, life, work experiences and socio-cultural background, and design knowledge (Tschimmel, K. 2010: 244). It is generally understood as a problem-solving mechanism. Herbert Simon states that design is the key element in human cognition and action as “Everyone designs who devises courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones.” (Simon 1969: 11). Dorst (2003: 191) considers designing a basic human activity. The author metaphorically compares the designer as an explorer, the design process as an investigation journey towards the best possible outcome, and the design methods as the resources one has to complete the expedition.

In the lexicological and socio-cultural aspects, the origin of the term “design” goes back to the XVI century and essentially defines a course of thought and arranging that might incorporate the drawing steps. "To design" can be utilized as a verb (to create or to plan) or

as a thing (an arrangement, drawing, or model appearance of how something is to be made). Whilst in English, the word "plan" can allude to both an interaction (the work of making arrangements) and an outcome (an image, design, course of action of shapes). As an action word, "to design" depicts a dynamic (imaginative) advancement measure that focuses on arranging future activities and communications. Thus, design is often depicted by various scholars of the discipline as a subject that prompts the formation of artifacts. Design as a subject matter is often associated with innovation and evolution. Evolution and progress mean that problems that did not exist yesterday now do, and a solution for them is needed. New problems require new flexible ways of ideating and of taking the most out of known and available resources. This makes constant ideation and problem-solving a necessary approach to life. On this evolutionary take on design, we can portray the creation and setup of items, innovations, or techniques as a plan of action firmly connected to the likelihood of survival. Furthermore, these capacities (valuable, utilitarian, stylish, emblematic, and so forth) are dependent upon extremely inevitable change. (Tschimmel, K. 2010: 244). Design is a human action, by definition. Mukai (1996: 58) states: "Design is to be understood in the real sense as a mode of action which has as its object the creation of our innate basis for life. Human design activity is closely bound up in particular with the three human fundamental spheres of human action: production, communication, and living".

Buchanan (1992) states that design as a discipline has evolved to become more directly associated with communication, construction, strategic planning, and systematic integration.

He refers to four ways in which design impacts everyday life. The first is symbolic and visual communications and is usually the most common area associated with design. This includes graphic design, such as typography and advertising design, illustrations, book and text production in general, as well as digital wayfinding, media and film visuals, and photography. The author adds that this area of design is expanding into handling problems in communicating information. The second is the design of material objects, often referred to as product design. This area covers the ideation and manufacturing of everyday products,

concerning their form, function, and visual presentation. This field is fast expanding into an investigation of construction challenges in which form and visual aspects must carry a more holistic argument that merges components of art, engineering, natural science, and human sciences. The third area includes the design of activities and organized services. Such as management challenges including logistics, the effective sequencing and scheduling of objectives, instrumentalities, and the human factor in order to accomplish stated objectives. This field has developed into a concern for logical decision-making and strategic planning and is swiftly growing into an examination of how improved design thinking might assist in achieving an organic flow of experience in specific settings. Making these processes “more intelligent, meaningful and satisfying” (Buchanan, 1992: 9). The fourth area regards the design of complex systems (also known as environments for living, working, playing, and learning). This area explores the role of design in improving the unity and functioning balance of any multi-disciplinary context. This topic is increasingly concerned with the function of design in supporting, developing, and integrating people into larger ecological and cultural contexts, whether by influencing them when desired and possible or adapting to them when essential. The author states that design (and, therefore, the way in which a designer thinks) “point toward certain kinds of objectivity in human experience and the work of designers in each of these areas has created a framework for human experience in contemporary culture.” (Buchanan, 1992: 10) This research defines design thinking as design’s holistic view of human experience in the totality of accessible knowledge.

As for the historical definition and coming to be of the term, it is attributed to Rowe (1987), a professor of architecture and urban planning at Harvard’s School of Design. Rowe coined the term "Design Thinking" as the title of his book that year. It is also often attributed to the design agency IDEO where David Kelley (Kelley and Littman, 2005) started applying design-related tools onto different fields in order to sustain and promote radical innovation. IDEO states to have been using design thinking since its becoming in 1978:

“(…) we've been practicing human-centered design since our beginning in 1978, and took up the phrase “design thinking” to describe the elements of the practice we found

most learnable and teachable—empathy, optimism, iteration, creative confidence, experimentation, and an embrace of ambiguity and failure.”  
Retrieved from: History. IDEO. Retrieved October 20, 2021, from <https://designthinking.ideo.com/history>.

At IDEO, the company that designed the first computer mouse, this process is thought of as overlapping spaces, and not so much as orderly steps (since creativity is a vital part of it). In the IDEO company, teams are advised to keep in mind three main spaces: inspiration, ideation, and implementation. Being inspiration the problem, opportunity, or briefing that demands a solution; ideation is a process of coming up with ideas, testing, and putting them to action; implementation as the solutions journey from the project room to people’s everyday life.

The goal of using a design thinking approach is not only to aid tackle current issues but also to ideate desirable scenarios for future development. It provides a holistic view of a problem as well as tools to solve it in a viable, feasible, and desirable way. Design thinking (DT) is defined as a process to ideate and conceive new realities, through design’s culture and methods in all areas regarding people-centered innovation and action. A design thinker does not have to be a designer, they can be someone from any educational background that uses and implements design thinking tools and methodologies to promote empathy, fluidity, and human-centered visual innovation. (Tschimmel, K. 2014: 161) Design is an integrative discipline, meaning that it draws upon, adapts, and contributes to almost every academic discipline for data to be used in seeking and identifying patterns and possible connections that result in the improvement of the context in which it is applied.

Designers are often going from idea to idea and interchanging possibilities (proposals). Cognitive psychology has shown that designers focus their creativity and analytical skills on the creation of solutions, testing and improving them, not on analyzing the problem upfront them, and improving them until the solution is satisfying. This is one of the main advantages of the design ability. (Dorst, 2010: 133) The author states the basis of DT ideology is “more or less the same in all cases”, is divided into the following equation:

WHAT + HOW leads to VALUE  
(thing) (working principle) (observed)

Whereas the basic reasoning pattern is described in this equation:

WHAT + HOW leads to RESULT  
(thing) (scenario) (aspired)

Brown (2008 : 2) defines Design Thinking as “a discipline that uses the designer’s sensibility and methods to match people’s needs with what is technologically feasible and what a viable business strategy can convert into customer value and market opportunity”. This makes DT an ideology focused on values like human-centeredness, risk embracing, collaboration, and sustainability. Thomas Lockwood, former president of the Design Management Institute, a leading association of design practitioners working in the business “a human-centered innovation process that emphasizes observation, collaboration, fast learning, visualization of ideas, rapid concept prototyping, and concurrent business analysis” (Lockwood, 2009: 26). Design Thinkers step into the end-user's shoes, by carefully observing their behaviors and tendencies. Solutions and ideas are concretized and communicated in the form of prototypes as early as possible so that potential users can test them and provide feedback (Brown, 2008 : 3). This explains the efficiency of the second equation: since society is evolving, new problems arise for which existing principles might not give viable solutions. By making up a variety of people-centered (for whom the problems need to be solved) scenarios, early prototyping, and feedback asking, new solutions can be ideated with less cost to the organization.

The author provides five key concepts of design thinking’s ideology: empathy, collaboration, visualization, rapid experimentation, and business analyzing. Firstly, an empathetic approach may both inspire and assist in gaining consumer insights and identifying unarticulated stakeholder needs. “The best way to do so is by getting out in the

real world with consumers, with open-minded collaboration, even with codesign concepts” (Lockwood 2009: 30). The essential factor here is, to begin with, an interest in understanding—not in persuading, as has been the case with many classic push-product development strategies. It is advised for designers and researchers to go out and interact with the target audience, encouraged to be open-minded. The second key factor of design thinking, according to Lockwood (2009: 31) is collaboration, meaning involving stakeholders from all fields, in order to promote a collaborative interdisciplinary mindset. The third part is the increase in the learning effectiveness through “visualization, hands-on experimentalism, and creating quick prototypes” in which the goal is to make quick mistakes in order to learn valuable lessons faster and with fewer costs. The fourth key concept is rapid experimentation or prototyping, in which the intangible becomes tangible through the contextualization and visual explanation of a solution (Lockwood, 2009: 32-33). The fifth and last aspect is the business analysis and the combination of creative ideas with more traditional and systematic strategies, for a holistic perspective throughout the whole process.

Design thinking’s ideology defends that an idea to be successful must comply with three criteria: it has to be desirable, feasible, and viable (Brown, 2009: 19). Many businesses place an undue emphasis on the latter two—they begin with a new technological breakthrough or a business strategy, but fail to consider the user's perspective.

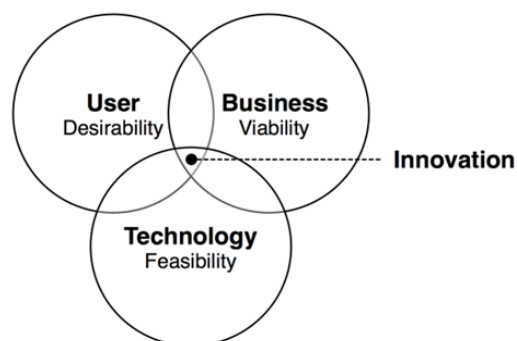


Figure 15: Criteria for a Successful Innovation, adapted from Brown (2009: 19) retrieved from Mueller, Roland & Thoring, Katja, 2012: 154

In sum, design thinking ideology is based on visualizing problems and concepts, developing people based-scenarios, and designing business strategies based on research methods in order to tackle wicked problems, future issues, and innovation. It is an integrative discipline that derives from and can be applied to most areas (from art to science) and is based on values such as human-centeredness, risk embracing, collaboration, and sustainability. Its key concepts are empathy, collaboration, visualization, rapid experimentation, and business analyzing and are linked to criteria-driven innovation.

### **3.4.2. Design Thinking Methodology**

As mentioned above, there are several ways in which design thinking can be followed through and implemented. These vary on the author, proposed model, site of implementation, and problem to solve. In a 2012 study, by Mueller, Roland & Thoring, Katja (2012) when describing the DT process, the authors describe a detailed model consisting of six steps from briefing to the end result, with several iteration loops that resulting from the last step ‘test’.

“This process is that it does not start with an idea, but with a problem or a question, instead. Ideas are developed within the process, in the fourth step 'ideation'. Before that, there is an extensive focus on the research, where 'understand' means secondary research and 'observe' means user research. Here, design thinking makes use of research methods from other disciplines such as ethnographic methods and other qualitative methodologies. The acquired knowledge is then condensed into a sort of micro- theory about the problem or the user needs, the 'point of view' (POV) that is afterward used to develop solution concepts in the 'ideation' step. It is here where innovative ideas are developed that aim at solving that previously identified problem or address the users' needs. The selected idea is then visualized or built ('prototype') to test it and gather feedback from prospective users ('test'). According to the feedback the concept is iterated, by returning to one of the previous steps.”

(Mueller, Roland & Thoring, Katja, 2012 : 154 )

The process begins with 1) Understanding the problem: clarifying who has to be integrated into the team, which technical process is necessary, how to formulate the question so that the customer need/problem is defined; then 2) Observing: Research and on-site observations are carried out, through interviews, written surveys, observations.; 3) defining the target group and establishing a comprehensive understanding of the customer and his

needs and behavior; followed by 4) Ideation, when brainstorming takes place.; 5) Prototyping (sketching, modeled, simulated, etc.); and finally 6) Testing, when ideas are fully developed they are tested. If the feedback of all of these phases is positive, then the solution can be implemented. If not, then the team must go back to where it failed and try again, knowing what they know now.

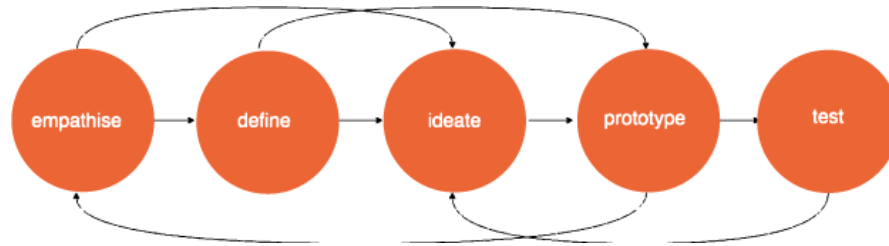


Figure 16: Design Thinking Process at HPI D-School (adapted from Plattner, H., Meinel, C., & Weinberg, U., 2009)

Thoring and Müller (2011, b: 2) present a process model illustrating the design thinking process. The authors focus and build on the HPI’s approach (Hasse Plattner Institut Design Thinking School in Berlin). This model is one of the most comprehensive models found in this literature review and gives a very complete notion of design thinking’s process. The six rings of the HPI design thinking process are enunciated, along with a description of what occurs in each stage. The proposed model of the design thinking process is depicted in Figure 17:

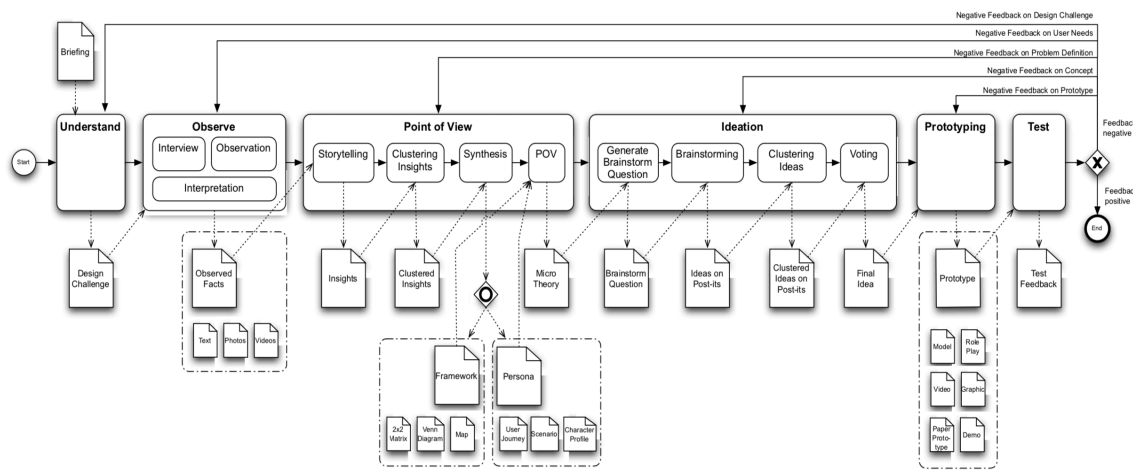


Figure 17: Detailed Design Thinking Process Model (retrieved Thoring, K., & Müller, R. M., 2011: 2)

Liedka (2015) summarizes common DT tools in most models, such as visualization, entail the use of imagery, which can be either visual or narrative in nature. Along with traditional charts and graphs, it can take the form of storytelling and the use of metaphor and analogies, or it can take the form of capturing individual ideas on post-it notes and whiteboards for collaborative development.

Ethnography is a category of qualitative research methods that focuses on gaining a thorough understanding of users through observation and interaction in their natural habitat. Participant observation, interviewing, journey mapping, and job-to-be-done analysis are all techniques that could be used here; structured collaborative sense-making techniques such as mind-mapping enable team-based processes for extracting insights from ethnographic data and establishing a "shared mind" among team members.

Collaborative ideation aids in the generation of hypotheses about potential opportunities through the use of brainstorming and concept development techniques. These tools capitalize on difference by encouraging a set of behaviors centered on withholding judgment, avoiding debates, and paying close attention to the tensions that difference generates when seeking higher-order thinking and developing more innovative solutions; assumption surfacing, identifying the assumptions underlying the attractiveness of a new idea in terms of value creation, execution, scalability, and defensibility.

Prototyping techniques assist in concretizing abstract concepts. These include storyboarding, user scenarios, metaphor, experience journeys, and illustration of business concepts. Prototypes are intended to improve the accuracy of feedback conversations by allowing decision-makers to create more vivid manifestations of the future.

Co-creation techniques involve users in the process of generating, developing, and testing new ideas.

Field experiments are designed to validate a hypothesis's central underlying and value-generating assumptions in the field. Conducting these experiments entails field testing the identified hypotheses with external stakeholders using prototypes, with an emphasis on disconfirming data (Liedtka, 2015: 928).

The Evolution 6<sup>2</sup> Model offers in-depth detailed guidance of its steps as well as how interactive and visual it is. As seen above, visual thinking plays a crucial role in DT. Visualizing ideas about different perspectives of the task helps to increase the space around the problem and, as a result, create additional space for new possible solutions. Creative thinking is part of the cognitive processes that include “flexibility, originality, and fluency” (Drucker, 1984). What differentiates “creative thinking” from “design thinking” is that creative thinking is a more broad concept that aims to achieve “newness”, whereas Design Thinking is a more practical and applied term, that could help convert users’ needs into opportunities.

This model divides the creative process into six stages: Emergence, Empathy, Experimentation, Elaboration, Exposition, and Extension; each stage is subdivided into two sub-stages that correspond to moments of divergence and convergence in thought. The first stage is Emergence involves the identification of a project opportunity and helps to understand what is the challenge. Some tools at this stage include the Inspiration Board, Intent Statement, and Opportunity Mind map. Empathy, the second stage promotes the understanding of who is the user. This stage includes tools such as Interviews, Persona maps, or User Journey Map. The third stage is Experimentation: the generation of ideas, separating the best ones, and developing concepts. The key tools at this stage could be Brainwriting or Sketching, Semantic Confrontations, or Evaluation Matrix. The fourth is Elaboration, in which material and semantic solutions for the selected concepts, developed in the previous stage, are developed. Tools that help to elaborate this process include tools like Rapid Prototyping, Service Blueprint, or Concept Testing. The fifth stage is Exposition, which highlights the importance of proper communication of the new concepts and

solutions. Here could be used a Solution Prototypes, Vision Statement or Storytelling Technique. The sixth and final stage is Extension, which consists of implementing, observing, improving, and further developing the selected on previous stages solutions. Here, the tools could be used Implementation Map, Action Plan or Roadmap.

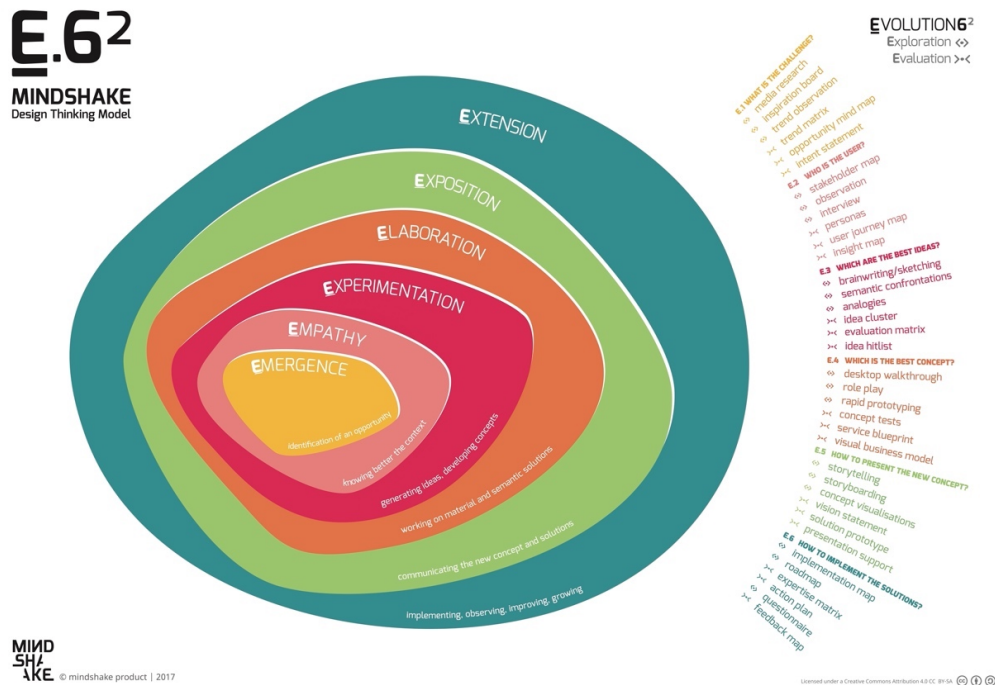


Figure 18: Evolution 6<sup>2</sup> Model I (retrieved from MindShake website, and by courtesy of the author)

In total, the model includes 36 tools and techniques that can be applied to each stage. It is a DT model that was developed for all types of businesses and organizations with the goal of accelerating their transformation and innovation processes. It is an effective framework that is adaptable and flexible in order to meet the business's goals and objectives.

The author bases the model on five essential pillars gathered from a range of literature, some of which already mentioned above:

Human-centered approach - Products and services should be experienced from the user's perspective. 'Real' people's needs and desires are at the center of the whole Design Thinking process.

Collaboration - DT is a collective and participatory process. As many stakeholders as possible should be included throughout the phases of the process.

Experimentation - DT gives space to think in variety and of many possibilities. Some may not succeed. Playful thinking, making mistakes, and learning by doing is an important part of every creative process. Without some failures, nothing really new will emerge.

Visualization - Images have the power to synthesize and clarify ideas, in an internal and external dialogue. Quick prototyping helps the learning process and improves the initial ideas. The visualization of concepts simplifies what seems complex, and fosters connections between ideas.

Holistic perspective - Every product, service, or media message belongs to a system of interactions and interdependent entities. The wider context and environment of an artifact, service or business model should be considered in every innovation process.

### **3.4.3. Branding and Design Thinking's impact on Relationship Marketing**

In order to keep up with today's globalization challenges, some companies are switching from mass-market, product-only offerings, and impersonal marketing to relationship marketing in order to target and establish engaging connections with stakeholders. However, the gap between their intentions and actual implementation can be bigger than desired.

Gummesson (2002: 13) attributes this gap between ideas and action to three reasons, the company itself, external causes, and the misunderstanding of the concept of marketing. The first can be attributed to the brands' "lack of implementation skills and stamina (...) difficulties grasping the essential (...) lack of data or inability to put together data in a meaningful pattern or map". The second depends on what Gummesson (2002: 14) calls random variables, and they are customers, competitors, the general economy, and technology change. What makes them random is the lack of ability to predict with accuracy its happening, correlation, and cause. The third reason for the gap between relationship marketing goals and then later implementation originates from the misunderstanding of marketing theory's core essence: the understanding the needs and wants of the customer. The solution, the author states, lies in investing time and effort in establishing strong relationship marketing values as guidelines for the company's actions. Gummesson's (2002: 14 - 16) fundamental values for relationship marketing are: turning marketing management into a more broad marketing-oriented company management, meaning that everyone within the company influences customer relationships in some way; long-term collaboration and win-win, meaning the creation of mutual value through the establishment of partnerships between the company's stakeholders; all parties should be active and take responsibility, to promote shared value every stakeholder must bring something to the table; and lastly, relationship and service-based values rather than bureaucratic-legal ones.

Buchanan (1992: 9) when referring to the four areas in which design contributes to and impacts contemporary life, emphasizes that one of them is management challenges, including logistics, the effective sequencing and scheduling of objectives, instrumentalities, and the human factor, in order to accomplish stated objectives. According to the author, design thinking provides tools that facilitate logical decision-making and strategic planning and is swiftly growing into an examination of how improved design thinking might assist in achieving an organic flow of experience in specific settings. A specific example of the use of design thinking methods to help guide marketing strategies, in non-design related

literature is Kotler and Keller's (2016: 98) statement that companies occasionally build mental maps of customers to illustrate their knowledge of a specific brand in terms of the major connections that are likely to be evoked in a marketing environment and their relative strength, favorability, and originality to consumers.

According to Sequeira and Warner's (2007) research, stakeholder engagement should be a strategy taken on early in the project, proactively approaching discussion and requiring resistance to the urge to postponement because it might still be early and one might not have all the answers or are concerned about raising expectations. This translates into the advice that stakeholder engagement should be an iterative method. The authors state that "Engaging with stakeholders from the start – as part of your core business strategy – enables a proactive cultivation of relationships that can serve as "capital" during challenging times." (Sequeira and Warner, 2007: 6) According to the authors, the stakeholder engagement process should also be adjusted to fit the project at stake, meaning that it should be a flexible approach. As seen above, design thinking is also an iterative method, which is why a design thinking methodology could contribute to the successful implementation of the stakeholder engagement methods.

From the previous literature review, it seems to be noteworthy to mention terms that brand image, brand identity, relationship marketing, and stakeholder engagement methods all have many commonalities. A defined brand image and brand identities are key to successful and well-planned relationship marketing and stakeholder engagement strategies. These last two fields are both human-centered, relationship, collaboration, and empathy-based. So is design thinking, which reinforces its impact on the other fields.

## Chapter 4 – Case Study

In order to answer the research objectives, a practical research methodology has been chosen in the form of a case study strategy. The main difference between applied and basic research is the type of outcome. Basic research is aiming to find information that has a wide base of application and eventually could add new value to the already existing scientific knowledge. Whereas applied research is directed towards finding the solution for a specific, practical problem and as a result tries to guide how things could be changed (Rajasekar, Philominathan & Chinnathambi, 2006: 8). In order to understand how design thinking can impact Trema's branding and relationship marketing, according to stakeholder theory, a chronologic analysis of Trema will be presented. To achieve an informed conclusion, it is necessary to explore the following topics:

- Background of the brand;
- Trema's approach to branding and marketing before the implementation of design thinking methods;
- Stakeholders' view of the brand before the implementation of design thinking methods;
- Need for the rebranding and the implementation of the design thinking methodology;
- Trema's approach to branding and relational marketing after the implementation of design thinking tools;

#### **4.1. Background**

Trema is an accessories brand inspired by the combination of aesthetic coherence, design, quality, and simplicity – traits transversal throughout products, processes, and communication. The value proposition of the brand is to reinforce the real affective bond between clients and their products. Having nature as an integrant element, when duly interpreted creates an experience of belongingness and appreciation for the environment. This feeling of appreciation with the ‘awe of nature’ factor is the step stone inspiration for the creation of Trema.

The brand recently repositioned itself from a product-only offering to a product and service-based offering. It is now a collaborative project focused on creating and curating. The creation involves up-cycling of otherwise redundant materials, by bringing together designers, artists, and master craftsmen in order to create these unique long-lasting objects. The curating involves the brand now providing a stage to share artists’ and creative’s works to Trema’s audience and to connect them with each other.

The mission is to create more and better products with fair and genuine processes, where quality joins longevity and the design joins an authentic, simple, and refined style; as well as creating a community of creators.

Trema started in 2014 when its two founders decided to map Portugal’s craftsmen and redesign some of their personal favorite accessories. The two founders each come from families whose expertise lies in the jewelry and fashion sectors. One from a family of centuries-old Portuguese crown’ jewelers, Leitão & Irmão, and the other from TM Collection, an ethical fashion brand. The two decided to put their knowledge to the test and combine efforts to create an accessories brand together. Through interacting with manufacturers, they soon learned about industrial leftovers and deadstock: high-quality materials in small quantities left behind in warehouses due to being considered redundant.

Using two main materials, silver, and up-cycled leather, they began creating an exclusive series of handmade, high-quality, long-lasting objects. In late 2014, the first collection hit stores in Lisbon and the project began.

Today, the brand is based in Oeiras, with a retail presence in Comporta and in Lisbon. Being Trema focuses on quality over quantity, so the circular economy is one of the project's main focuses. As stated on the brand's website:

“We initiated our journey to find more redundant materials and create ways to bring them to good use - up-cycling. That led to the latest metamorphosis of the Trema Project, our collective approach to creativity and communication process needed consistent new input from fresh sources of talent.”

As so, the brand started reaching out to talented young creatives outside the team in order to collaborate together. It is this collaborative mindset that guided the company towards its renewed vision: to have exclusive and unique collections, brought to life by different artists, designers, and artisans and share their work with an audience of wants to hear about it.

Aiming to contradict the fast fashion mindset, Trema's pillars are Nature, Design, Quality, Heritage, and Culture. Its manifesto being:

“Fostering talent. Finding elegance. Best quality. Made to last. Supporting local. Promoting handmade. Master Craftsman. Inclusive mentality. Limited editions. Up-cycling materials. Responsible consumption. Circular value. Trusting the process. Being meaningful. Praising Nature. Looking good. Grounded products. Finding new ways. More creativity. Finding Symbols. Sharing experiences. Community.”

With the mission of bringing together creative minds and expert hands, in order to create shared value through “slow fashion”. All of Trema's employees are multidisciplinary entrepreneurs, working with a network of artisans, artists, suppliers, and freelancers. The relevance of studying this company's relationship marketing is driven by the amount of collaborations and partnerships it aims to reach as well as the familiarity its reduced size allows. Trema's size is useful for this case study due to the fact that, as Simon Sinek's book

“Start With Why” states: “When the organization is small, WHAT they do and WHY they do it are in close parallel. Clarity of why is understood because the source of passion is near (...) allows that feeling of being a part of something special to flourish” (Sinek, 2009: 208). For being a people-centered, collaboration-centered, and iterative approach, it is conjectured that design thinking can provide pertinent insights on the definition of the new brand identity, on how the brand image is used to engage with stakeholders, and therefore potentiate the brand’s relationship marketing.

#### **4.2. Trema's approach to branding and marketing before its rebranding.**

According to the brand’s 2014 internal documentation and written business plan, the concept first entailed the establishment of a company that will initially sell accessories – specifically bracelets and wallets – with the goal of eventually marketing a line of garments. The items would be marketed through an online shop and physical retail locations, with an emphasis on the male market.

“The goal is to build a brand with a hippie-chic personality that is connected with global fashion and lifestyle trends seen in the world's most diverse metropolises. The brand will have a strong and distinct character, and its goods will strive for clarity in their differentiation, balancing quality, price, exclusivity, and style.”  
(Trema Project Business Plan, 2014: 1)

The brand's mission was to portray a lifestyle that is centered on individuality by emphasizing self-awareness, the visual aesthetic of the products, showcasing the beauty and tranquility of nature, and relating to fashion trends, alternative music, and modern art. In other words, the brand’s goal was to provide products that met the needs of what the founders understood to be “the cool” customer. This customer, to the eyes of the brand at the time, frequents trendy locations, listens to trendy music, and dresses in trend. Trema’s goal was to create a brand with whom this type of customer would identify. The target audience niche, according to the brand’s business plan, was not only demanding but also

extremely loyal to the brands with which they had a favorable relationship. The brand's goal at first was to target a very specialized market niche but eventually, expand into other categories.

Trema physique at its genesis was a “minimalist, natural, organized, sustainable, positive and refined image that will be reflected in the entire experience that the consumer will have with the brand.” (Trema Project Business Plan, 2014: 1) It aimed to have an established and defined brand personality, translated through being vocal on its own ideology as well as its own aesthetic. The brand wanted to distinguish itself by not being considered an accessories brand but also an “interesting” brand. The strategy used to achieve this was trying to promote engagement through starting conversations on various themes, from spirituality to music. The brand intended to be physically present in several of the places frequented by the target customer. A very strong presence on social networks was intended as a key to allowing constant interaction with customers. The brand aimed to be associated with events of high-end goods, brands, stores, restaurants, and clubs that share the same type of target and work with similar concepts – the contacts that the team involved with the project were considered to be a key aspect to achieve this goal. In terms of brand design, the concept was developed by a hired, external, freelance designer for that purpose.

The brand created as its symbol the two dots present in an umlaut (Trema, in Portuguese, is the visual representation of an umlaut, represented by two dots), incorporated with the letter “E”. Simple and minimalist, it allows the brand to be recognizable while being easily applicable to any product or background, whilst remaining in line within the brand's identity. These same two dots are intended by the company to allow the consumer to easily create an association between accessories (namely the brand's best-seller product, the B1 bracelet) and the Trema brand. At the time, the name was tested with some target customers and the feedback was very positive. It also had the advantage of being an existing name in all languages (except for English) which would help the brand gain exposure in markets other than Portuguese. The brand would come to have a line of packaging for its products

that would align with the intended target by using modern designs and quality materials. The brand's idea at the beginning was having the target customer have a whole range of pleasant sensations when purchasing the product, not only provided by the product itself but also for the entire experience that the acquisition process will involve, from the interaction with the brand, the purchase process, the product itself and the packaging.



Figure 19: Photographs that show Trema's look and feel before rebranding, 2016 (courtesy of the brand)



Figure 20: The first logo of Trema, 2014 (courtesy of the brand)

In terms of market, the brand makes frequent references to the term “hippie-chic” target niche. According to their initial marketing plan, they identified this niche trending in most countries at the time, with the reassuring existence of strategic connections on the part of the team in several relevant countries (Portugal, Spain, Germany, Greece, Italy, England, France, Brazil, and the USA). The initial goal of the brand was to first try to succeed in the Portuguese market and then expand and export its products.

As for competitors, brands such as Caia, Selvva and Hikers had similar concepts and target audiences, at the time. The success of some of these brands was remarkable and encouraged Trema to move forward with this niche, for they believed that the hippie-chic market was growing and gaining traction.

The targeted hippie-chic market is a niche and with its own characteristics, but it is a lifestyle also, according to the brand’s 2014 Business Plan. Customers who are not the typical hippie-chic end up interacting in some way with the trend that was very present in the daily lives of the world's big cities, where Lisbon is an excellent example of this due to the easy-going “beachy” lifestyle Portuguese metropolitan cities lead (when comparing a

coldest, gloomiest city, for example). It is with this transversality, tackling a mixture lifestyle niche that has a growing tendency in 2014, that Trema intended to gain a competitive advantage. Customers who are not the typical hippie-chic end up interacting in some way with a real trend that is very present in the daily lives of the world's big cities, where Lisbon is an excellent example of this. It is with this transversality that the Trema brand intends to gain a competitive advantage, since, gaining a strong acceptance in this market, the brand's strategy is, in the long term, to be able to expand its portfolio to other types of products outside the universe of the market. accessories such as clothing and even events. Reaching different segments and including the female market. To reach different segments and include the female market.

In terms of demographic audiences, the brand targeted men between 15 and 40. Upper middle class, educated, with active participation in social networks, someone who followed fashion trends, buys accessories (bracelets, yarn, cufflinks, wallets, glasses, sunglasses, watches), and looking for stylish and differentiated products.

In the first idealization of the brand, the only known design thinking tool used was persona mapping. In 2014, the persona of Trema created was the following:

- Gender: The typical consumer is male, although the products can easily be used by women;
- Age: 20-40;
- Profession: The typical client is someone with a high educational background, who works in different areas (the typical Hippie-chic can work as a designer, be an entrepreneur, creative, or even a musician). Looks for a job that is aligned with their personal interests and tends to avoid big corporations;

- Financial Situation: Upper middle class, has purchasing power, and is highly selective. Accepts to buy products a little more expensive than the market average as long the reasons for doing it are clear (such as style, exclusivity, and innovation);
- What is the interest in this type of product: The target customer pays attention to what he wears. It follows the trends in the sector and always tries to be the first to discover them (also known as the early adopter in the trend wave). They want products that are somewhat unique and that can somehow stand out within their social storyline, where all their friends are looking for the next cool thing;
- Free Time: The typical customer, likes to socialize, looks for stylish environments and trendy places. Drinks socially and enjoys music. He likes to share his sensitivity with the cool aspects that surround him. He attends music festivals, practices sports, enjoys being immersed in nature, and seeks to cultivate a high level of culture, within the themes that interest him;
- Buying Decision: The customer is price sensitive, they will not “throw money out of the window” however they attach great importance to the image and what it intends to communicate. They attach great importance to the customer service and will praise the brand that treats him warmly but at the same time politely. Likes practical processes and impulse buying. Aspects such as product packaging and image have a key connection with their brand awareness;

- What other products do they buy: clothes, looks for products with a certain level of exclusivity, gadgets, likes to avoid mainstream products, and are willing to accept new brands, as long as they are line up with the trends they like.

In terms of marketing actions, Trema's strategy was based on three main vehicles: social media, word of mouth, and presence in events/markets and stores.

The initial strategy used was the engagement of strategic contacts and word of mouth to create brand awareness. To this end, existing contacts within the team were involved. Namely celebrity endorsement from a wide range of industries, combined with the strong exposure in social networks to obtain a very high level of exposure at a low cost. Catalogs of existing and/or special edition products were also sent to friends and family and sold by a word of mouth strategy: "we did a catalog for friends, family, and special clients. It contained a code with a discount and a contact number to perform the sale." (II2); "The brand was once more exclusive than it is today. It was an era more focused on special customers because they had limited collections." (II3); "We sometimes sent customized catalogs to our most loyal customers, loyal people, people who wanted to know what's new, and that really, most of all, when we released something, we got a response and feedback" (II5). This was the preferred selling strategy before the rebranding.

In the beginning, the brand was present on several social networks, has given emphasis to Facebook as it was the most popular social media channel at the time, and then more recently to Instagram. The brand's social media pages served as an "informal store" where each product was presented with its price and reference. Since there was no existent website, the goal was to allow the customer to send a private message communicating their purchase intention, provided with banking details to make the payment that was met with an address so that the product would be sent by post. In order to have a strong position in the hippie-chic sector, Trema intended to have the following online format: it would not just

only be a page with the intention of making sales but also with the intent of engaging with customers. Punctually, and strategically chosen, sharing of information, thoughts, music, artists, events and even other brands would take place. The goal was that the customer would resonate and engage with the brand.

Besides the strong social media, key selling locations were also a recurrent strategy to sell products and connect with customers. A large majority of these locations were intended to be compatible with a small amount of stock to sell to the public, not only with the intention of obtaining sales and studying product acceptance within the target market but also with the intention of gaining exposure by directly interacting with the customer. The brand was often physically present at small fairs, flea markets, and trendy small businesses events that were (and still are) gaining traction in Lisbon, such as LX Factory's Sunday Market or Spot Market, in Amoreiras shopping center. It also has its products in Traces of Me (TM Collection) stores, in downtown Lisbon and in Comporta Village.

Below, you can find in figure 21 Trema's usual setup in fairs and markets, before the rebranding:





Figure 21: Trema's set up at fairs, 2018 (courtesy of the brand)

In terms of stakeholder engagement, the focus of the brand was much more to appeal to and interact directly with customers than any other stakeholder (as seen above). According to III:

“Back then, our internal stakeholders were people whom we were paying a salary. As for and our external stakeholders' relationship was either the established mandatory one of service requirement and payment (with artisans and suppliers, per example) or awareness actions such as social media posts, word of mouth, and presence in events. Back then we were learning how to establish and manage real relationships with our stakeholders. We were trying to understand what were the difficulties of producing something, how we could create a relationship with an artisan, even though we order limited collections so they were making little money and we needed to keep him motivated to work with us... That was pretty much the focus.”

In terms of communication efforts to create relationships with stakeholders, they were mainly in the form of company presentations to show the people the brand worked with or aimed to do business with, what the brand was doing.

### 4.3. Stakeholders' view of the brand before the implementation of design thinking methods

Being a product-based brand, before the rebranding, Trema's brand image was very much intertwined with the product attributes. Namely its best seller product, the B1 bracelet. This bracelet style is often associated with tradition. In the '70s, these bracelets were popular and trendy and were associated with balance. Trema's stakeholders associated the brand with the familiarity they felt with this product. The older generation remembered it from the 70s fashion, and the younger generation recognized but could not really associate it with anything other than tradition, due to their elder relatives.

“I think I remember my grandfather used to have a similar one, and at the time it was associated with balance or something. It reminded me of my grandad, of traditional jewelry. Meaning something that was well made, that would last you a lifetime, so it represents a meaning to me.” (IE3)

Due to the quality of the bracelet, made out of solid silver and with a very minimalist design, it came back into fashion amongst certain types of social groups and became associated with social status. “I had already heard about Trema, but very little. For me the Trema was the classic bracelet (...) if I go down the street and see someone with a metallic bracelet with two spheres, I associate it with Trema.” (IE1) This particular stakeholder, who has this perception of the brand before the rebranding, when asked about the type of person they associated with Trema back then, answered:

“a man, the cool kid, with social status. In terms of target, I would say with average purchasing power. I don't think it's an expensive product (for the quality it is, in silver). Imagine a person who is having an active social life, wearing a Trema bracelet is a status, almost. It is not at the level of a Cartier, for example, but thinking about the logistics of Portugal it ends up being associated with a young man with high social status.” (IE1)

All interviewees associated the Trema, before the rebranding, with having a more masculine tone, which is in line with what the brand intended back then. Internally, the whole design was made for that purpose as well: “I would say that in the beginning, the

look of the brand itself and how it looked was very minimalist and it was very brutalist, in a way. Meaning it had a lot of very steep edges, a lot of corners, triangular shapes.” (II1)

“I thought Trema was a brand for men. Despite being unisex products, which anyone who wanted to use but I identified with a male brand and I think this was notorious in all the first graphic and photographic content. It was a more minimalist look, formal, not very colorful. At the time, the brand would have been a man. Then I can show you an editorial that was done before entering Trema that I think perfectly translated the man who is assigned. [shown in fig.16]” (II3)

One product-related aspect that existed before the rebranding, that withstood since 2014 and is still a vital part of the brand identity, is the meaning and emotional value that the brand intends the objects convey to their users. Almost every primary stakeholder wears a bracelet B1, as all that wear them seem to have an emotional connection to it:

“I have the B1 bracelet, this is a bracelet that, it's not the newest, most recent, isn't it, but it's a bracelet that's been with me for many years, and it's fantastic when I see photographs from years ago, it is always there on my wrist. And that is why it is a companion who is with you present in our life. And that is our goal, products that last and products that have meaning for the person, in limited edition, and quality things and with the sustainability factor.” (II4)

“Now I have one of the bracelets, so that is something I wear almost daily. That is important for me, most things that I buy here and there have to have a personal meaning or have to be gifts from friends and family. I like things that have history, with which you can make sort of an emotional bond with it. (...) One of the benefits of Trema is definitely emotional (...) I recently lost a present that was a very cute tiny functional purse and I'm heartbroken. You get attached to these things, they become part of your life. They become an extension of yourself that I really believe in and that also comes into choosing the products that you buy well.” (IE4)

This emotional connection to the objects is something rooted in Trema's identity and is still one of the core goals of the brand. The brand aims to create products that are long-lasting and of the best quality (quoting their website “ Products that last create memories”) and that have an attached meaning. In the words of Trema's founders:

“We aim to create products and visuals that you can relate with (...) I always had this notion that accessories are a bit of our personal ambassadors. We started by creating long-lasting objects, that were locally handmade with industrial leftovers. Trema has something which makes it very special for me, within the products. Before the rebranding and now. Which is: we created things for people to enjoy themselves.

We believe that beauty should not be someone else's interpretation, it should be something you do for yourself. People that use our bracelets like them because they really think get better looking by using them, they feel that the accessories are stylish and nice.

The goal is to create this logic of objects that can somehow love you back. Emotional value plays a big part in the way that our consumer relates to the purchased item. I usually compare the feeling in adulthood of having a favorite object with you at all times with the feeling of having a favorite toy, as a kid. It is a part of you (...) We realized we wanted to create objects that, when you looked at them, you could be reminded of something which perhaps is important for you." (II1)

"Things that could mean something to the customer. (...) a wallet, a bracelet, or another type of product that we produce, which would adapt to each client. (...) And that's why people who really looked at these products, and really saw something here, with affection (...) but people who really had an identity, who really thought it would thus be something they could count on. (...) a product that will be with you a while" (II4)

This is why, in the brand's marketing and communication actions, the use of human models is not as recurrent as one would expect from an accessories brand. The brand chooses to present and advertise its products either by itself or in a natural environment, to portray its connection to nature. This choice makes the advertising more about the product attributes and not about the social status or body image associations of who is wearing them in the advertisement. For Trema, the reason to purchase one of its products depends solely on the taste, intention, and individuality of each consumer. The product represents either a functional benefit or the emotional and symbolic benefit the user-created with it. "I see Trema's image as something minimalist and that, unlike most accessory brands, it's not trying to sell a lifestyle. It's rare to see people, so I understand that the brand is there to show the product and not to attribute a lifestyle associated with the brand." (IE1) The fact that the brand aimed to sell to the hippy chic market, but its brand image according to its stakeholders tends to be not associated with that lifestyle or any other, is a sign that the brand was growing into a different identity from the one planned in the first business plan in 2014.



Figure 22: Trema's Instagram Posts, 2017 (courtesy of the brand)

In terms of marketing actions, most of the interviewed external stakeholders have little to no recollection of Trema's marketing actions prior to the rebranding, although they were implemented only a few months prior: "I knew who the founders were, but I associated the brand with a passion project rather than an established brand." (IE1); "I remember the bracelet the B1 bracelet, which was the first thing that I came across with the brand (...) but I can't remember any marketing actions back then." (IE3); "No [can't recall any of Trema's marketing actions prior to the rebranding]. I believe that when the brand was born, it was before the boom of young Portuguese creative brands. The only idea I have is that Trema from before is that it pioneered this [the boom of Portuguese creative brands]. I don't even

know what year the brand started, but I know that at that time there wasn't much going on like that.” (IE5) One of the interviewees managed to go into detail about what she/he remembered from the brand's past actions:

“It was definitely leather goods. That I remember. This was all pre-pandemic, by the way. So, 2019. I remember the goods I thought were very physically or aesthetically appealing. I think it was wallets... well, they were definitely leather things. In terms of the visuals I also really liked it was photography. It was always very clean, so there was this imagery often not overbearing. (...) I think from the marketing one could understand what the brand is trying to do, the way it sources materials, and all the sustainability which of course comes through the image. (IE4)



Figure 23: Trema's Leather Products Instagram Posts, 2016 (courtesy of the brand)

In terms of marketing actions on social media, they were held seasonally in accordance to the popular dates of endorsing consumer's buying will, such as "Christmas [campaigns], Valentine's Day campaigns (...)" (II5).

Another important finding is that most of Trema's prior marketing actions were held mostly offline, being directed to the consumer and not towards other stakeholders. This offline strategy was in the form of word of mouth, store presence, and event and markets' presence, as mentioned in chapter 4.1.1. "I remember Trema being a brand I already knew, probably seeing it at markets and fairs because that's the image I have most of the brand before joining the team." (II3). As one of the founders explains:

"(...)in terms of marketing actions, I think there was more presence at events, such as markets. It was something that we were naturally doing, we simply wanted to show our product and the way we created it, and at certain times of the year to give greater emphasis to increasing sales. (...)we focused a lot on the offline part, we had an online one, but an online one just a little bit more with a presentation, more as a link between all our social networks, and basically based a lot here on the offline part. (...) The idea is to talk to our customers. The idea was, and is, to make them feel a little part of the brand (...)We really want people to come and talk to us. Relational marketing was what we were really looking for, but naturally, we didn't bore the customer, we didn't send thousands of emails. We simply talked to them, to see if they liked the product. We were creating these relationships with our customers. Our way of talking to our stakeholders has always been very intimate. We speak directly to them, in the markets, through our stores, on our social networks, namely our Instagram" (II5).

Visually, the brand was always taken as simple, focused on the product's aesthetic and the brand's inspiration towards everything in regards to nature.

"We would love to reconcile our products with nature. To show that simplicity (one of the words is very much linked to the beginning of our brand, simplicity. If I had to say again what Trema symbolized in a few words, I would say it was simplicity, long-lasting, and nature.) Simplicity, for us, was a part of the entity. Simplicity was what we really liked to show. therefore, beauty often has to do with things that we sometimes neither know nor perceive and are by our side. Having a leaf in the fall, with those bright colors next to a bracelet, in our view made a fantastic combination. That's why we didn't just use the traditional methods of putting a pretty model to wear with bracelets or wallets. We communicated all the products by using nature. We put wooden setups, at the foot of a bush, etc. These were ideas that we continue to use today because we're still very attached to nature" (II5).

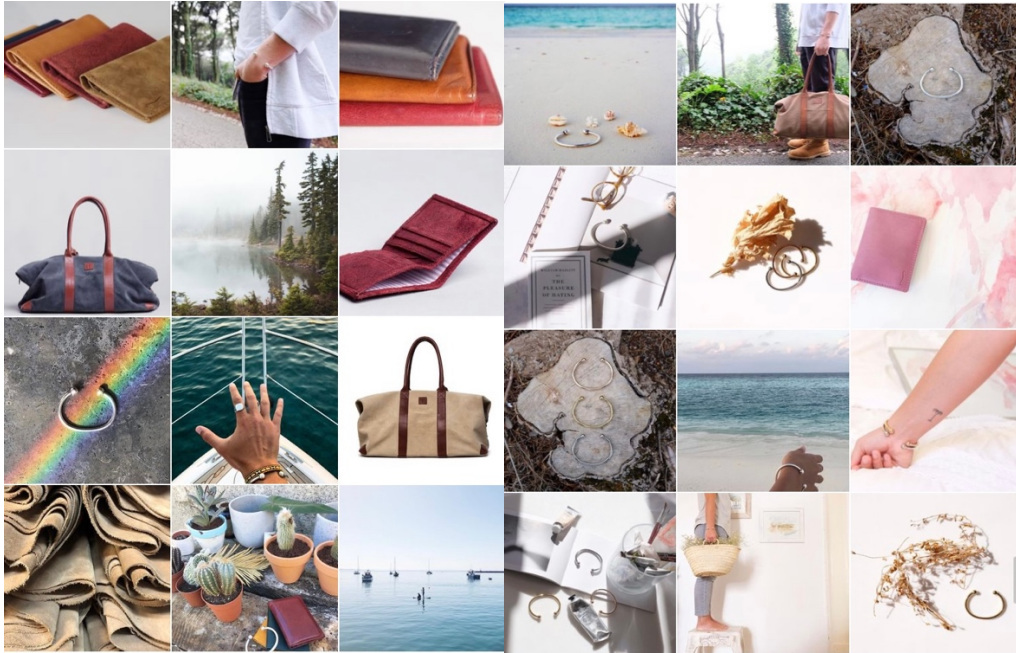


Figure 24: Trema's Instagram Feed, 2016 (courtesy of the brand)

According to the internal stakeholders of the brand, the common goal was achieving the “ideal product” (II2). The association every stakeholder mentions, when interviewed on the brand image, is quality. This quality came from a very strict work ethic, from years of experience that the founders' families have on the topic. This made so that the product's ideation span was very long, resulting in some products only coming to the public much later than idealized.

“One of the benefits that I think is a constant at Trema today is the quality of execution and the quality of the materials. As part of an ecological assumption of reuse, these are always very good quality things. These are pieces that promote an experience because they reflect the perfectionism, care, and taste of Trema. (...) many times the prototypes went back and forth. They are only approved after many details were corrected. (...) doesn't allow things to be done more or less: if it's not perfect, it doesn't even come to the public. This is how they guaranteed quality. (II3);

“We were constantly thinking, devising, and developing the ideal product. We would always be ‘jumping around’, and there wasn't much direction. I think it [the common goal within the brand] was the ideal product.” (II2);

This attention to detail and meticulousness come through to the brands' external stakeholders and is a big part of the brand's reputation. This guarantee of quality and sustainability is associated with the brand until this day: “I am a jeweler, and when I look at

an accessories brand I like to see the quality and the metal product. The bracelets that are developed by Trema, whether in stainless steel or silver, when I look at the marketing of this product, I see quality” (IE1); “the handmade and local factor (...) Just by producing in your own country, you are promoting a sustainable business. Then, also the quality because handmade items done by master craftsmen assure the product’s quality” (IE3). Internally, this is also part of the brand identity:

“We focused a lot on the quality of the handmade, on Portuguese jewelry and leather goods. In the fact that the materials used were from sustainable leather because they were upcycled, we only used premium leftovers. We do not use leftovers from any brands, we use leftovers from really great quality brands, made by artisans from the Portuguese textile industry.” (II1)

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As for the brands’ stakeholder engagement, as mentioned above it was much more focused on engaging solely the customer and the brand’s audience. Relationships with other external stakeholders were mostly contract-based: “We had relationships with the suppliers and artisans, mostly contractual” (II2); the brand always made sure to keep its stakeholders happy and satisfied, but there was not an active engagement. Trema’s relationship to the artisans and suppliers was mostly contractual and long term business relationships:

“I think there was a great effort to reach the right suppliers and very real people: in other words, the objective was to reach, for example, not a large factory but a specific artisan who was very good at doing a certain thing, like working with silver. There was this concern, related to what I’ve already mentioned about the characteristics of quality and durability. But not much else” (II3)

“Back then our stakeholders were people whom we were paying a salary. As for and our external stakeholders’ relationship it was either the established mandatory one of service requirement and payment (with artisans and suppliers, per example) or awareness actions such as social media posts, word of mouth and presence in events. Back then we were learning how to establish and manage real relationships with our stakeholders. We were trying to understand what were the difficulties of producing something, how we could you create a relationship with an artisan, even though we order limited collections so they were making little money and we needed to keep him motivated to work with us... That was pretty much the focus back then. (...) Before,

most of the people we worked with were a service we hired. So the contact was mostly bureaucratic” (II1).

To resume, Trema before the rebranding held a product-based offering of up-cycled, sustainable long-lasting objects made with the goal of each client making it their own through the creation of memories and an emotional connection. The focus of the brand’s marketing efforts was directed towards the consumer via social media, word of mouth, and offline channels such as markets and stores (in which the brand contacted directly with its external stakeholders). In terms of image associations, what stands out is the bestselling product (the B1 bracelet) and the quality, awe of nature, and sustainability factors. In regards to stakeholder engagement and relationship marketing actions, the brand’s directed focus was on creating relationships with the consumers and audience; whereas the relationship with other external stakeholders such as with the artisans and suppliers was often in a contractual service offering way.

#### **4.4. Need for rebranding and Application of Design Thinking methodology**

In 2019, Trema started undergoing a rebranding. This need for change came when the pandemic started and face-to-face relationship marketing was no longer an option. With the growth of the company, it was expanding in a direction doing things that were not in line with the brand identity.

From what was gathered from the interviews held with the brand’s internal stakeholders, one can conclude that this incongruence came from two different factors: the confused brand identity, the non-identification with the non-sustainable cheaper product, and the marketing action that were not in line with the brand’s core. As the founder of Trema puts it:

“Before, what we wanted was not coherent with what we were putting out there. I start feeling incoherence when we made the decision of designing and selling steel bracelets that were imported and not locally made. They were cheaper than our handmade, locally made, up-cycled accessories and they looked nice, so they sold

really well. However, this to me was not aligned with our purpose because they were objects with no real meaning behind them, no hand-made marks, no personality. I noticed that the consumer we were attracting was again people that just wanted to look cool, and I realize Trema does not resonate with that, anymore. Me, as the founder I was no longer interested in having that value proposition.” (II1)

“The brand was once more exclusive than it is today. It was an era more focused on special customers because they had limited collections. (...) [Before] Being products made in very few quantities, people felt unique because not everyone could have this or that bracelet. I think they felt important and unique. They felt they were given a vote of confidence in buying a Trema product. As if they felt they were supporting a small business, but that one day it would still be very well known. As if they thought ‘I will be one of the firsts to own this product. (...) Before working with the brand, I noticed that people recognize the name and ask “that brand that has leather wallets? That brand that has bracelets?” Even without an established identity, the brand image was already settled in the minds of the target audience, which already identified and recognized the brand. (...) [Now it] Allows more people to have access to products. Right now there are more exclusive products and products for everyone. So now the brand is for many types of people (...).” (II3)

Trema’s target was trendy and hippy-chic consumers. However, their offering consisted of traditional and long-lasting products. Meaning consumers were confused by the communication of the brand, and the brand did not understand why they were not attracting loyal and engaged consumers. In terms of marketing actions, besides participating in some of what are considered to be the most consumerist marketing dates and strategies such as Black Friday and Valentine’s Day, giving the impression to its customers of lowering their prices to make a profit.





Figure 25: Trema's Marketing actions before the rebranding, 2018 (courtesy of the brand)



Figure 26: Trema's Marketing actions before the rebranding, 2018 (courtesy of the brand)

Trema also did several giveaways to gain visibility, but according to an internal stakeholder: "We did giveaways. but that never worked very well" (II2), they worked well in the sense that they attracted more followers and customers, but these customers did not value Trema's core offering of sustainability, quality, and slow fashion products and mindsets.

The rebranding design started with the need for a change in font because it no longer represented the brand's identity:

"It started because we no longer identified with the font. We even talked to a designer at the time to change the packaging as well, and we almost had to change to some things she made and we asked her to make us a catalog. Afterward, we didn't like the catalog. We realized that after all, it wasn't just the logo that needed to be changed, that maybe the communication on Instagram also needed an adjustment because we didn't have a great focus and we were posting just things we found beautiful. Then I think that it also began to realize that maybe the type of customer no longer corresponded to the target... We started noticing things and putting the pieces together." (II2);

"The brand is growing at the same time as its founders. I think the board members have grown to a different place than when Trema started. They began to have concerns about the meaning of what they were doing and about creating value. They realized that if this project was to continue, they wanted a brand that would mirror their values and vision.

I remember before I started working with them that they asked an outdoor designer to redo the brand's visual identity. When she presented the result to them, they realized that it wasn't just the look that had to change but also the whole identity and mission.

They realized that they had to create disruptive innovation. That they had to revolutionize the concept of the brand” (II3).

These incongruences, after a while, make the brand what it is. In order to better understand these phenomena, three design thinking’ and creative consultancy’ experts were consulted regarding the studied topics (branding, relationship marketing, stakeholder engagement, and design thinking’s conjectured impact on them). Semi-structured interviews were conducted, without the brand in study (Trema) being mentioned. All of the experts’ statements were derived from their own academic and professional experience and refer to past examples of their careers and other experiences. The statements are not in regards to this specific case study. They are intended to be viewed as a ‘living’ literature review, from knowledgeable key players on the subjects, that can shed a light on the happenings of this particular research.

One of the interviewees was Rui Quinta, a designer, and entrepreneur, who was part of one of the first teams in the world partnering with IDEO and Hasse Plattner Institut that was studying the connection between design thinking and branding. Rui founded several businesses, among which are With Company, a strategic design consultancy; Tonyo Studio, a space design consultancy studio that designs exhibitions for science museums. He teaches design management and entrepreneurship at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Lisbon, as well as strategic design and creativity and innovation at ISEG, also in Lisbon. He has coached teams in design thinking and innovation at Hasse Plattner Institut, one of the most prestigious design thinking schools in the world, and is a public speaker who has traveled all over the world giving speeches on the topics in study in this research. In the interview, when asked about the importance of branding, he stated that:

“You are made of the things that you experience and you are made of the things that you experience with other people, and through other people. You are made of these emotions that are generated between these interactions, between the learnings, between your knowledge, between everything that you have gathered throughout your life. And, again, it depends on you (...) about image: there’s this tendency that shows that the logo as the basic form of identity is disappearing. It’s more about the truth, what these brands are as self. This was a huge change in mindset for me” (IS3).

Quinta, in his own work, makes use of the idea of the brand self, made out of intentional interactions that connect the audience to the entity of a brand, consumers, and stakeholders are provoked by the brand just as a person is provoked by another person's actions, creating then associations derived from the interpretations of those actions. He states that good branding derives from talking with the persons behind the brand, and helping them conclude things that were not obvious but necessary:

"For, me the branding process is about making questions, is about involving people on the way (...) You cannot define the values of a company, you cannot define the purpose of a company if you don't talk to the people who actually run that company. You have to understand them. You have to sit with them. You have to understand for whom you are you designing this brand. You are helping them and they're helping you."; "I hire other people. I have to treat them the same way, with the same focus as I treat my clients, per example. I have to be really solid, in the way I manage these interactions to make sure they align with the principles of the brand." (IS3).

In the design thinking methodology used in Trema's rebranding, the Evolution 6 model, there is a tool named the Insight Map. This tool is particularly useful to reduce the gap between brand image and brand identity. In the words of the creator of the Evolution 6 model, Professor Katja Tschimmel: "It contains two sides: one side is representing the company or organization/brand side, and the other is the user or the end-user. In the middle is a heart, representing the matching points. On one side we put what we observe, what we learn by interviews, etc. And on the other side is the mission, the vision of the company. It has to match" (IS2). Katja Tschimmel is a doctor in design and a master in applied creativity. She published three books on design thinking and created the Evolution 6 model. She uses this model in her own company, Mindshake, which is a creativity and design thinking consultancy company she founded in 2010. She has taught for 15 years at ESAD Matosinhos and coordinated D-Think, an European project of design thinking applied to education and training. I interviewed Professor Katja to learn more about her model, for this research. According to Prof. Tschimmel, "the mechanisms of a creative process, are the basis" of every kind of innovation process (...) design thinking is a method that helped us to reduce the complexity of this process (the creative process)" (IS2). She

explained that her model, which was the model chosen to successfully implement Trema's rebranding:

"my model (The Evolution) was a creative process model, it was not a design thinking model. It only had four phases, and we based it on the methodology of design so it started with Empathy, Experimentation, Elaboration and it finished with Exposition. Later, I understood that in the practice of organizations, sometimes, they even don't know when project starts. So then I understood that we needed another phase, which now I call Emergence, and we needed a sixth phase to help companies also through design thinking techniques in the implementation phase so I called the last phase Extension because I needed an "E" so now it's E6 [model]. (...) one model is not better than the other (...) it's just a question of taste. (...) certain tools (which we haven't invented, there are a lot of design thinking tools available, such as Brainstorming techniques, Mind Maps, Journey Maps, etc.) are more opportune to use in certain phases. So, we showed (through the colors, for example) that the Mind Map, for example, is good to use at the beginning of a project. It is not a recipe, no model is a recipe. It is like a toolbox: you have a lot of tools, and then you have to learn and understand which is the best to use in which phase. (...) what you should teach is what kind of phases there are, what's happening in the process, which are the tools... But then also to explain that a certain tool can be used in this moment or in that moment. You can combine them" (IS2).

One of the main ideology factors of design thinking is putting people together and sharing different perspectives to get to the essence of a problem. Collaboration and interdisciplinarity are two key constitutions of this area. Paulo Dias teaches marketing and creativity at IADE – Creative University, in the marketing and creativity management course and at the business innovation course, and is the chief relations officer at iMatch, a creative consulting company based in Lisbon that helps companies “get better and faster ideas” through the implementation of design thinking methodologies. He has worked with companies such as BMW, McDonald's, and Microsoft, and agreed to an interview for this research project. In his words:

"When we get a problem, also in branding (even when we did our own brand) we always try to get people from complementary areas that can give their different perspectives. (...) We always get that involvement aligned by taking different perspectives. (...) We are not from human resources, we don't know those bricks that build a great company culture. What we do is put people on a design process, collaborating, talking to each other. Often times not about complex things, as it's about putting people that usually work side by side but they don't talk with one another. (...) designing a way of human-centered branding really makes the difference in terms of the results we are getting" (IS1)

Dias states that empathy is key when putting together these people from different backgrounds. It is another key constituent of the design thinking process:

“We have to promote empathy between them. (...) The goal was so that they could really get empathetic about what was happening (...) promoting empathy through Journey Maps (...) There was this richness, this value created from the different perspectives. So yeah, I do think [empathy] it's fundamental. (...) even when the communication is digital, don't forget there are humans talking to humans. Don't have to worry if you have a lot of knowledge or you don't, if you go from this very simple and essential notion that you are talking to human beings, a lot of the barriers go down and a lot of important insights come up. This is crucial for the success of any project" (IS1).

One of the interesting things that happened in Trema's rebranding implementation, is that they had started the creative process long before realizing that they had, or even before implementing a “by the book” design thinking tool from the Evolution 6 Model. Trema's internal stakeholders are driven by what they find beautiful, so they had already entered the Empathy phase long before the realization of the need for the rebranding. Prof. Tschimmel states this is very common:

“I understood that in the practice of organizations, sometimes, they even don't know when project starts. (...) So what we try to show through our model is that it is an evolutionary process. There's actually no natural start or end. There is the identification of an opportunity and then there are deadlines and there the project ends (because the process itself actually never ends)” (IS2).

To the creator of the model, the Empathy phase is the most important phase of the whole creative thinking process. Because “where you really understand the different stakeholders, their problems, sometimes you think something is a problem but it's not, and you discover new opportunities" (IS2)

“There was a moment after creating products and selling products that we understood that there is a big lack of communication and a big lack of good commercial effort done by people who create objects with love and care, such as artisans. So, in our rebranding, we aimed to create a solution for two different things: to create and curate.” (II2)

It was found, that the moment Trema realized that the rebranding was needed, the Emergence and Empathy phases has already started. As seen above, the author states that there is no particular order in which the model should be used, that the tools can be

combined. The Emergence phase identifies the project opportunity and helps to understand what is the challenge. The proposed tools at this stage include the Media Research, Trend Observation, Inspiration Board, Trend Matrix, Intent Statement, and Opportunity Mindmap. The company granted access to their elaborated Opportunity Mindmap and Trend Matrix, presented next:

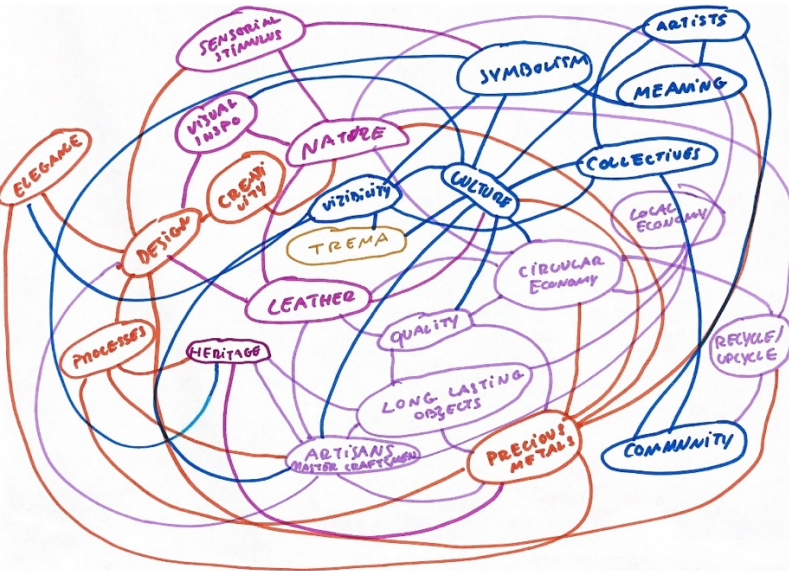


Figure 27: Trema’s Opportunity Mind Map inspired by the Evolution 6 Model, 2021 (courtesy of the brand)

TREMA  
TREND  
MATRIX

	FORMERLY	CURRENTLY	EMERGING
DESIGN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BRUTAL (DARK) INDUSTRIAL DESIGN</li> <li>AESTHETIC ONLY</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SYMBOLISM</li> <li>MEANING</li> <li>WALPH COLLECTIVE</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PEOPLE CENTERED</li> <li>BRING BACK LOST COLLECTIVE SYMBOLISM</li> </ul>
HERITAGE	- N.A. -	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MASTER CRAFTSMAN ON DEMAND</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MASTER CRAFTSMEN MAPPING &amp; HERITAGE FASCINATED ATTENTION</li> </ul>
CULTURE	- N.A. -	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>INSPIRATION FOR DESIGN</li> <li>MESSAGE IS PRODUCT CENTERED</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ALLURE PEOPLE TO THEM (NEWS) (PODS) (TELEVISION)</li> </ul>
NATURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>INSPIRATION (NATURE AW)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NATURE IS THE MISSION</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MESSAGE IS KEY, PRODUCTS ARE INFORMATIVE NOT JUST COMMODITIES</li> </ul>
PEOPLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CUSTOMERS</li> <li>SUPPLIERS</li> <li>EMPLOYEES</li> </ul>	//	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PRIDE ON HAVING GIVEN BACK TO NATURE</li> <li>COLLABS, STAGE</li> </ul>

Figure 28: Trema’s Trend Matrix inspired by the Evolution 6 Model, 2021 (courtesy of the brand)

In the Empathy phase, the goal is understanding who is the user. This stage includes tools such as Interviews, Persona Map, or User Journey Map. This phase helps put the brand in the shoes of the consumer/user to see the problem from their perspective. Tools used by the brand at this stage were Persona Maps (already used in the brand's first business plan in 2014) and Interviews.

At this stage, the brand realized one of the missing pieces in narrowing the gap between their brand identity and image:

“I wanted to bring people who could not be just customers, but also could understand that they could join our community of cool conscious people. I realized that the customer I was looking for must be also looking for us. People who may be disappointed at fashion today, that believe in locally made ethical objects have value-added” (II1)

Through the interviewing of their stakeholders, the brand realized the potential that collaboration and alliances had, and the shared value that could be created in using this realization to all the stakeholders' advantage.

“There's a difference between making things for money or for yourself. This second one, we discovered leads to the creative person really putting their soul and all that they are on the object. They own that creation. It's a product of their passion and hard work. This promoted ownership. What we can give in return besides monetary compensation, is a chance for dialogue and for alliances to be created. When you bring him a collaborative mindset people immediately have a different approach. They are open to listening to each other, to share visions and experiences. They create alliances with each other, and with our brand, in order to create a common strategy to move forward. I want to find people that together create something better. Bring something relevant to the conversation. Even if we don't quite know what that will be yet!” (II1)

This ownership is a direct impact of design thinking's methodology being grounded on collaboration, as explained by prof. Tschimmel in our conversation, in which she illustrated it by giving an example of a rebranding project Mindshake, her design thinking consultancy company, did in 2016. The main outcome of implementing a design thinking methodology in that specific case was ownership. Just like Trema realized, the owners of the brand Prof. Tschimmel and her team were implementing the tools on, benefited greatly from having to be themselves directly involved in the whole process. “The result was their

‘child’. They didn't get it from us, they worked on it” (IS2). This co-creation way of doing things, according to Tschimmel, was the biggest input of design thinking in that rebranding.

#### **4.5. Trema’s approach to branding and relational marketing after the implementation of design thinking tools;**

Trema’s internal stakeholders discovered that co-creation and stakeholder engagement to create a collective, The Collective, was their new found mission:

“We aim to create a collective of stakeholders creating value and meaning. We always hire people for specific objectives. But my dream is to engage with those stakeholders in a way that each of them represents a circle, and that the collective is a Venn Diagram. As opposed to having a lot of circles that are separated but connected with a line that is monetary compensation. By creating these alliances, we want to show them that: if they have doubts they can ask; if they have ten ideas for the same problem it doesn't really mean that they are dispersed it means that they have a lot of ideas and that we are here to listen and ideate. In the end it's about being available to listen to people and to give them our best from what we've learned so far. There is a lot of synergies, a lot of serendipity that happens from coming to someone and saying to them: ‘Hi. I love what you do. I would really love to get to know you as a creative, to understand what you do, how you are adding value and if together we can increase that value creation.’ For me, what is important in regards to the relationship with all our different stakeholders is they understand that have a place where they can feel safe to create, where we can discuss how to create more value together than separate. (II1);

“(…) they realized that it wasn't just the look that had to change but also the whole identity and mission. They realized that they had to create a disruptive innovation. That they had to revolutionize the concept of the brand” (II3)”

“We are bringing allies that benefit us and that we can also benefit. Trema will not be based simply on products made by us, they will be products made by us and others. I believe that, many times, by joining synergies, really creating these partnerships, we will be able to show our customers products that we ourselves had not imagined, but which are what they are looking for. We have a lot of ideas, and we want to create a lot of things, but we're limited to our perspective. By bringing in people with different perspectives, with different backgrounds and knowledge, who can benefit from what we have to give in return, we create this shared value. With the Collective, our objective is, in a first phase, to give them a voice and a stage, and in a second phase to create things together” (II4)

This shift in the brand’s mission and vision can be translated by the Figure 29:

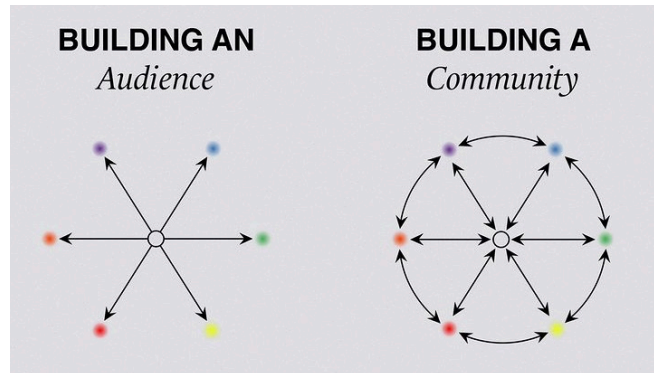


Figure 29: Building and audience VS. building a community  
(retrieved from @ikonick on Instagram, November 2021)

The radical change mentioned, is the evolution of Trema of going from a product-oriented offering to a service-oriented offering. “I would say that before we were a product-centric company, and now we are people-centric company” (II3). This shift in the brand’s goals made for a much wider relationship marketing need. They began acquiring and engaging with stakeholders they did not even consider before the rebranding. Trema now wants not only to make relationships with the consumer, to make them feel a part of the brand, but also creatives, artisans, and even competitors. Two of the interviewed external stakeholders for this research were jewelry designers that have been collaborating with Trema in upcoming collections. In the words of one of them, when asked what was Trema’s new purpose:

“So, Trema is not just about selling bracelets and leather accessories. It is a way of life in the sense that it connects its clients with nature and with new artists. From my experience with the brand, throughout this collaboration, we've made contact with silversmiths from Porto, for example. In which they put me in direct contact with them and they put them in contact with me. So it's also like they end up creating a circle of connections that benefits the interested parties. Just like a circle of abundance, and good energy.” (IE3)

As for the co-founder of the brand, he now defines Trema’s ‘why’ (referring to Simon Sinek’s Golden Circle’ theory) as:

“I think what we want to show today and looking at our transformation is: to show creatives is to give voice to artists, and if we really manage to create relationships with the right people, it will make us go further, it will make us give our customers much more useful and desired products. And because of that, being able to really put these different pieces together, it's going to take us a lot further.” (II4)

The Collective is not only a concept, it is a marketing action now put in action by the brand. The brand now searches for creatives whose work is in line with the values mentioned above, directly talk to them, visit their studio, record a photo interview of them and their work process to later share on Trema's website and other communication channels. The photographer of The Collective used to be the designer of Trema during its rebranding stage. She explains The Collective in the following way:

“The collective's newspaper or blog consists of interviewing people we admire, who have values similar to ours, documenting their workplaces. We go to meet them and interview them, as a way to offer the public content that is not just content for the consumption of products but for the consumption of art and culture, and at the same time, we give artists a platform to have visibility and possible new partnerships. Thus, going from a product-only offer to an offer of a service. In order to bring other ways of thinking, and to give our audience access to the magical worlds of the people we interviewed. My contribution to the collective came from bringing together the type of photography that most interested me with the identity where we wanted to arrive to” (II3)

One of the external interviewees was one of the interviewed artists. She/he has been following the brand for a few years and more recently she/he created a contemporary art piece that included a B1 bracelet and was also interviewed for The Collective. When she/he was asked to define her relationship with the brand now (after the rebranding) she/he mentioned:

“So, the art director came to my studio and we did an interview a few months ago, which was actually really firstly a lovely exercise, and secondly for me its input. I'm a big believer in cross-discipline so I like that approach. I believe it's important to work, to reach out across disciplines. Designing products can be a bit insular, fashion can be insular, Fine Arts for sure can be very insular. So it's important to make bridges between these disciplines and also the richer broader audience and learn from each other. So, I really like the initiative of The Collective. It is a way that the people who follow Trema can learn about artists, and creatives, it is the way that artists and the brand could potentially co-influence each other or collaborate (...).” (IE3)

Two of the external stakeholder interviewees were artists interviewed for The Collective, one of them had already their interview released and posted on Trema's marketing channels. In their words, when asked what their relationship with the brand was and what they thought was the purpose of Trema:

“I can say multiple [purposes]. I mean I really think, of course, is this sustainability and this giving back to Portugal using Portuguese suppliers. There's this rootedness in Portugal. I find it admirable. The second one is of course the symbology, but it feeds in with this sustainability is the way it's a particular way of leading life and thinking and taking things slower. In anthropology and ancient beliefs, symbology is associated with knowledge and meaning, it was the things that they listed it too and things that we were trained out of by contemporary western consumerist culture. So, it's really going back to this way of life, for me is the link with slowness. This connects with the sense of the creation of a community. You can't be on your own, you are part of a community. So I think it's that surrounding yourself with people in the sense of creating a healthy community and over people like-minded people, who can think a bit outside the box.” (IE3)





Figure 30: The Collective' interview photographs by @Maria Abranches



Figure 31: The Collective' interview photographs by @Vicente Leitão

One of the interviewees was an artist that has not yet benefited from the visibility Trema promised to give her through The Collective. When asked what were the first word that come to mind when she thought of the brand, meaning the brand image, they answered that Trema to them is divided into two parts:

“There is Trema as a product brand, and there is Trema as a collaboration service. As a brand, Trema has very sellable products. Trema's image as a product brand is based on minimalism and quality. Then, as an artist, I find this new service of the brand as A Collective, very interesting. To spread the work of other artists, to enable a possible collaboration between the brand and ourselves and even between the creatives themselves. I think these collaborations open doors that otherwise wouldn't be as easily opened. The brand is creating a network of people who, otherwise, might not collaborate or even know each other or know about the existence of others. I think this initiative is a win-win: Trema makes artists known through its own platform and makes itself known through those artists. (...) So far, in all the interactions I've had with Trema, I've realized that they are always very accessible and open people. There is, therefore, an opening for questions or exchanges of ideas.” (IE5)

One important aspect that changed is that the brand now speaks solely in English, in order to reach the maximum amount of people as possible, “We love and are immensely proud of being a Portuguese brand, and of products of Portuguese origin, but we realized that we wanted to be a brand of the world, we want to communicate, we want to communicate with everyone who has a vision like ours.” (II4). The symbol of the brand remained the same, due to the long-lasting promise (the objects that were done previously to the rebranding are still unequivocally Trema products), and the co-founder, when asked about this, responded that:

“We have a lot of respect for the look we created from the beginning. I think it's a strong brand, our E with the two little dots represents a lot of symbology that is very characteristic of the brand. Hence the same symbol continued, although the concept had changed. We felt that if we wanted to evolve, the visual part had to evolve as well. And so, in a way, modernize our typography a little bit here and, consequently, our own logo. Now it looks less rough, more elegant and unisex.” (II4)

Also in regards to the evolved brand image, most interviewees associated Trema with non-binary sex, as opposed to the first image of a more manly brand. One of them even associated Trema with being feminine. When asked if they could relate to the brand before, most answered negatively or that they could not provide an informed response for they did not recall any useful information that contribute to their answers. Whereas all of the external interviewees answered positively to these questions in regards to the rebranded Trema: “Yes. I think it is a mirror of everyone involved in the Project at the moment.” (IE3); “Of course. I just described a dream woman.” (IE2).

Stakeholder Engagement is now a focus of Trema. In order to fully implement the rebranding, the brand must establish contact and engage with all of these newly identified stakeholders. As answered by the internal stakeholders:

“For me, what is important in regards to the relationship with all our different stakeholders is they understand that have a place where they can feel safe to create, where we can discuss how to create more value together than separate.” (II1)

“I think that nowadays there is a much greater concern to integrate these people in the whole process, including the sale. In the past, relationships had more to do with bureaucracies and production. Nowadays, I think the goal has become for the Stakeholders to be part of the whole process. From product ideation to sale.” (II3)

“Good branding is when the why is clear to all stakeholders. I think what we want to show today and looking at our transformation is: to show creatives is to give voice to artists, and if we really manage to create relationships with the right people, it will make us go further, it will make us give our customers much more useful and desired products. And because of that, being able to really put these different pieces together, it's going to take us a lot further” (II4)

In order to successfully engage the newly recognized stakeholders, the brand had to adapt its relationship marketing strategy, evolving from consumer orientation to a holistic orientation:

“Now, we're also focusing on the part of curation. Which is something we are working on through the building of a database of a close group of clients, artists, artisans, and designers. Now, we look for talent and we try to present that talent, we try to understand that talent and make an alliance with them, a symbiotic relationship to establish a win-win connection between us and this network. So, we collaborate and/or partner with this talent by creating pieces and/or showing their work on our platform to give them visibility. What we get in return is fresh input and the creation of value through like-minded people trying to make meaningful and sustainable objects (...)

One thing we give them [the creatives, in return for their collaboration] is visibility. Trema has existed for a few years, we have a certain level of traction within our network of clients and press that pay attention when we present someone whose work we love.

The second is everything we know we share with them. My family has a workshop of artisans that is 250 years old, so we really understand the struggles creatives go through in understanding how to market themselves. Through these relationships, we present to them the same chessboard that we use to sell our own products. Many times that's just the kickoff to something better. We aim to create a collective of stakeholders creating value and meaning. (...) in regards to the relationship with all our different stakeholders is they understand that have a place where can they feel safe to create, where we can discuss how to create more value together than separate.” (II1);

“Our marketing goal right now is to build the database. Containing relevant people that want to receive the message we are trying to pass. We want to create a database of people that resonate with what we are doing and have an interest in taking part in our project. Being consumers, artists, artisans, designers, suppliers. Once this database is elaborated, our marketing directions will be directed towards the relationship between Trema and those people who care” (II3)

As Rui Quinta states that this awareness of what a brand has to give to the table is key to the survival of the brand. Quinta focuses on the word “relevance”, stating that one must observe people such as the clients, the users, and the individuals who connect with the business to ascertain their demands. One must first comprehend their priorities. What are they on the lookout for? One must ascertain and comprehend what is significant to them. One must examine their brand and determine what makes it unique. If the core essence is not discovered the brand is only pursuing something and will not survive for it is not innovative. By connecting with stakeholders, giving them relevant value, it is formed “an alliance and helping those stakeholders. The secondary result, was that it raised brutally their sales” (IS3).

In conclusion, from the analysis of all of the 12 interviews (9 of which to Trema’s stakeholders, the other 3 to specialists on the topics in a study in this research), Trema’s rebranding was not just visual but mostly in their offering. The brand started as a male-targeted, ethical accessories brand that emphasized the special relationships they had with consumers and distinguish itself from the competition through a strict quality guarantee policy as well as a sustainable way of producing. It can also be deduced from the brand’s pre-rebranding marketing actions and interviews that the brand needed to grow, having

tried a variety of strategies that diverged from the mission of Trema. Through empathy taking, collaborative and interactive mechanisms provided by the design thinking tools, that help guide and explore the creative process, Trema's founders and internal stakeholders felt that they had outgrown its current offering so they evolved it into a service-related offering. This was a radical change, whilst maintaining some of the visual identity they had in line with the core essence of the brand. The brand found so many benefits in going to the stakeholders and interviewing them directly that they decided to expand their relational marketing strategy towards having to do exactly that on a regular basis, increasing their value proposition towards a different kinds of alliances and relationships. As a result of this, Trema's brand image changed in the eyes of its stakeholders, is now considered a collaborative project of creating sustainable, unisex, meaningful & handmade accessories. This establishment of the new differentiating factor of curating alongside creating will help the brand reach a broader audience, create more diverse products, and have a constant exchange of ideas and talent through The Collective. The design thinking process never ends, so it is expected that the brand will keep implementing diverse tools as the process evolves through time and new needs or problems come up.

## **Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Implications**

This chapter aims to relate the case study findings to some of the theories gathered in the literature review in chapter 3. It will provide closure and guidance towards future research, as well as fulfilling the goals presented in the introductory chapter. The research goals were:

- “To explore and understand the concepts of brand image, brand identity, relationship marketing, stakeholder theory, and design thinking”:

This goal was achieved through the literature review as well as the interviews with specialists in the concepts in the study, having had an overview of what has been studied academically and found more relevant for this research as well living proof of the use of these areas in real-life marketing and business scenarios.

- “ To explore the models provided by literature on these topics, and applying the most fitting to a real-life branding context”:

This goal will be fulfilled in this chapter.

- Verify if there is any impact on how the brand identifies itself;

As concluded from the interviews undertaken, transcribed, and analyzed, after the design thinking guided’ rebranding, the brand now identifies itself with a newfound mission of promoting collaboration with artists, artisans, and creatives by sharing their work and collaborating with them in mutual benefit partnerships.

- Verify if there is any impact on how the stakeholders relate to the brand.

All stakeholders interviewed, without exception, state the way they related to the brand changed. These changes resulted from the new mindset of co-creation the brand adopted

onto its rebranding. Originated from interviewing their stakeholders and identifying an opportunity of engaging with them, reinforcing relationships and thus creating shared value through alliances.

## **5.1. Brand Identity**

To achieve the third goal, Kapferer's Brand Identity model was applied to Trema before and after the rebranding to understand how exactly the brand identity changed:

### **i) Physique**

Defined in the literature review as the way a company presents itself externally (visual of physical appearance including shapes, color, text, logo, etc.) it is a first vital step in analyzing a brand for while a brand name is how the audience defines it, they first try to visualize its physical attributes and associations to recall it.

Before: The brand presented itself through a logo (Trema with the symbol instead of the letter E inside a diamond shape), or through its symbol (the 'E' with the two dots on top). The symbol is friendly and minimalist at the same time, as the two dots resemble two eyes on top of the 'E'. The 'E' is very minimal, being composed of a zig-zag line that transmits the modernism and minimalism of the brand. The umlaut (the two dots) is derived from the brands' iconic bracelet (model B1) that has an open bracelet with two metal spheres on each end. The colors used by the brand were black and white and often adapted to the background it is put on. The font and logo were modern with a relaxed and friendly twist (the two dots of the umlaut look like they form a face and body). The brand played with this symbol adapting it to special occasions (as seen in figure 30).

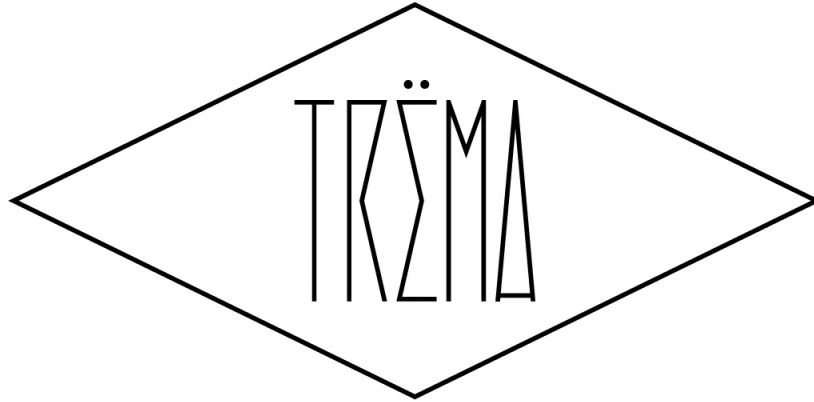


Figure 32: Trema's first logo, 2014



Figure 33: Trema's symbol variation for Easter, 2016

After: The brand's logo continues to have two variations. The 'E' symbol with an umlaut (¨) on top (figure 35) and the other is the TREMA lettering in the brand's new font (figure 34). The two dots, besides still alluring to the B1 bracelet, now represent the duality in which the brand now bases itself. In accordance with this minimalism, the colors used by the brand are very sober (beige, white, and black) and the fonts the brand uses are serifed and classical to transmit a certain romanticism and poetic visual essence. The whole visual identity of TREMA plays with this duality. Being modern, contemporary simple/minimalist, and geometrical but at the same time being classical, romantic, poetic even, and contemplative.

# TREMA

Figure 34: Trema's new logo, 2021

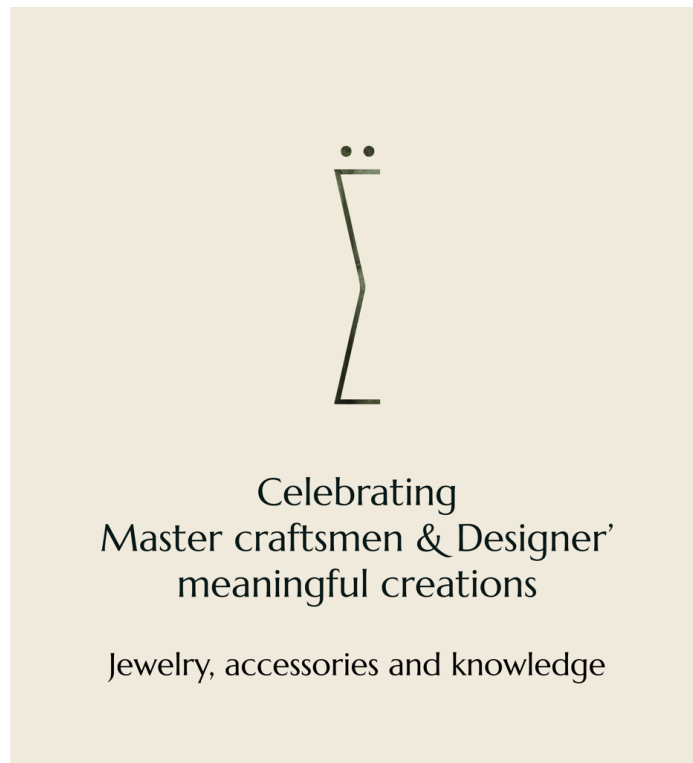


Figure 35: Trema's symbol application, website' pop up and product branding, 2021

## ii) Personality

Personality is the way the company communicates itself to others, what are their values how, and how they are chosen to be communicated to others.

Before: Trema's personality was closely linked to its founder's. It appealed to the 'cool kids' by making appearances in the trendiest spots, and focused on being worn by what the brand considered to be trendy and hippy-chic consumers. The goal of the brand was to be considered a cool brand, with well-made accessories to offer.

After: Now, after the rebranding, Trema's personality is modern and elegant, with deep reverence towards heritage and nature but with eyes on a more sustainable and connected future. It is now a mix of 'esoteric' and chic, as well as cool and classic, underlined by strong know-how. It can be adapted to each partnership created by the brand, as long as it keeps the brand identity whilst doing it.

## iii) Relationship

Relationship is the external core values, meaning what the customers aims to receive from using the brand besides from the product itself.

Before: What the customers could expect was exclusivity, social status, and know-how from the well-made durable objects.

After: What costumers can expect to receive from using Trema's products, is the duality between modern and classic style, inspired by and in awe of nature. The products, by being made in limited editions by different artisans in collaboration with various designers and jewelers, promote social distinctiveness and collective exclusivity, as well as a conscious sustainable fashion statement. By participating in The Collective, customers aim to feel included in this community of creatives and feel special for having their opinion and influence taken into consideration., they also gain the durability and quality promise of the product.

## iv) Culture

Culture represents the fundamental values of the brand, its mission, and the vision on which the brand's behavior is based.

Before: The culture of Trema before, was based on the duality of trendy vs. long-lasting and hippy-chic vs. traditional. The mission was to create the perfect product the target audience was seeking. The vision was for the brand to be considered an 'it brand', meaning a cool and trendy brand that would be used by consumers of a higher social status. The mission was to create the perfect, durable product.

After: Trema communicates itself as a project that fosters talent; finds elegance in local, made to last and handmade creations; that is inspired by nature as its slogan is "Talent working together is nature doing its thing". It values creative collaboration and strives for a community of creators of meaningful objects. This emphasis on meaning also translates itself to the use of symbology as a conversation and imagination starter. The brand is very vocal about its values, naming them as the brand pillars. They are five in total: nature, design, quality, heritage, and culture. Quoting directly from TREMA's website, the brand's five pillars are:

- Nature, "We contemplate Nature's beauty. Attentively, we observe, interiorize and feel the visual and emotional stimulus that nature offers. We intend to celebrate natural beauty throughout our productions."
- Design, "Fresh, cool and simple designs. The objective is to create intemporal designs for everyday items. We design what we consider significant towards a style of joy and finesse."
- Quality, "Quality is the main pillar of our existence as a brand. High-quality products that create real to everyone involved in our business - our clients, audience, suppliers, and teams. We consistently search for new elements within the process. Materials, ideas, talent, trends and so forth, with the objective of getting better quality."

- Heritage, “Our activity implies constant interaction with artisans that master different techniques. Our products objectify the knowledge built over generations of material manipulation by our team of manufacturers. Our products represent all this heritage, locality, and technique.”
- Culture, “We are agents of culture, that crosses our creative path. The more we look, the more we find. There is information everywhere and we want to share what we learn, what we find relevant. Our quest is to bring into our products the culture of their locality, found both, in the products or what they represent.”

#### v) Reflection

Reflection is how the company sees its ideal customer, how the brand’s customers are identified by others.

Before: Trema’s ideal customers were ‘the cool kids. Meaning, the always-in-trend consumer goes to the most fashionable events and surrounds themselves with the trendiest people and brands.

After: Now, the brand’s customer is identified by others as someone who is effortlessly cool, elegant, and chic but at the same time approachable for its practicality and vocality on important subjects (such as symbolism, environmental awareness, and culture).

#### vi) Self-Image

Self-image is the way the customers see themselves, their own values, and who they are as people.

Before: Trema’s customers, before the rebranding, saw themselves as fashionable and prestigious for wearing an exclusive, cool, and trendy brand such as Trema.

After: Trema’s costumers see themselves as contemporary/modern connoisseurs of quality and meaning, supporters of the arts, and with a conscious sustainable mentality and consumer pattern.

The graphic representation of Kapferer’s Brand Identity model applied to Trema before and after its rebranding is shown below:

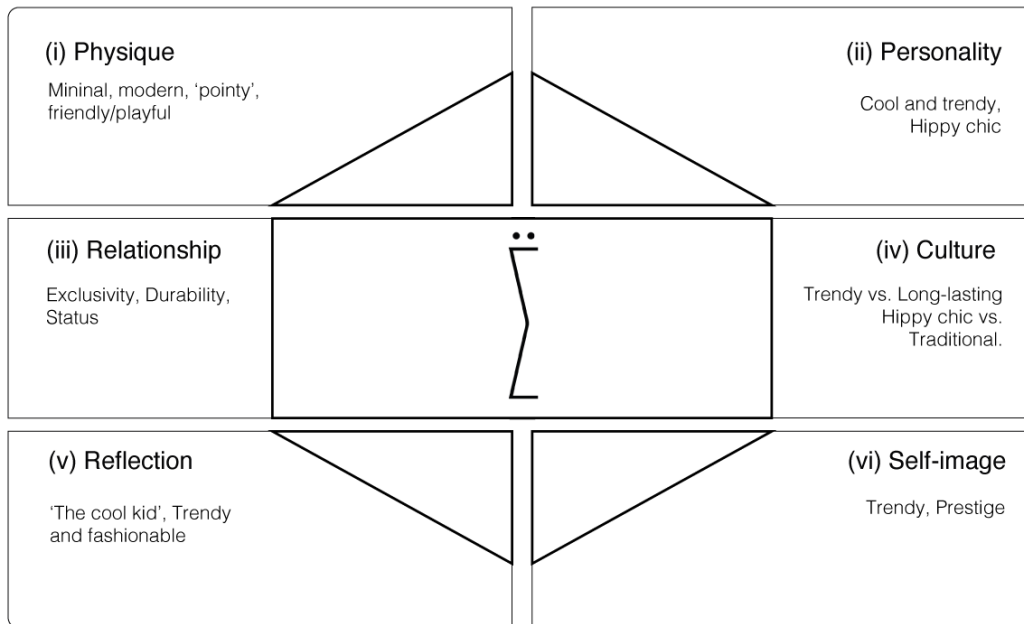


Figure 36: Kapferer’s Brand Identity Model applied to TREMA, pre rebranding (2014-2020)

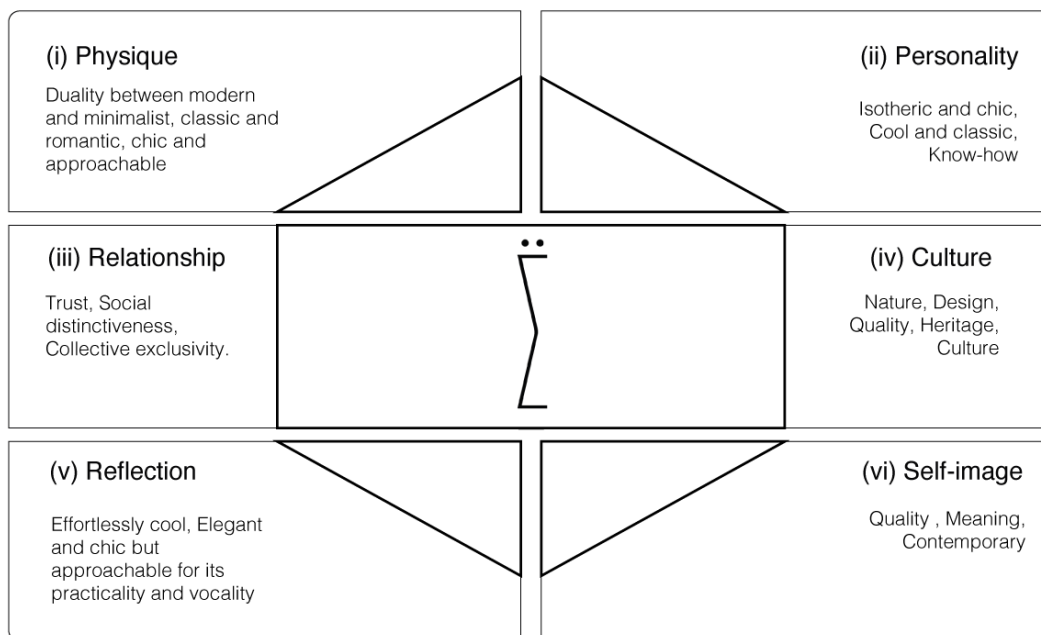


Figure 37: Kapferer’s Brand Identity Model applied to TREMA, post rebranding (2021)

The third goal, to verify if there is any impact on how the brand identifies itself, was partially answered in the previous case study chapter. After the application of Kapferer’s Brand Identity model, it can be concluded there have been several changes in the way the brand identifies itself pre and post rebranding.

**5.2. Stakeholder Engagement**

One of the main effects of the changes in the brand identity of Trema was the new stakeholders the brand now has and the way it engages with them. Based on Freeman’s (1984: 25) Stakeholder View of the Firm figure, a graphical representation of the Trema’s stakeholders before and after the rebranding was made. These figures represent two simplified maps, taking into account those “that can affect or be affected by the accomplishment of the organizational purpose” (Freeman, 2010: 25). The author states that every category of the stated stakeholders can be divided into smaller more specific categories for not all suppliers, per example, are alike.

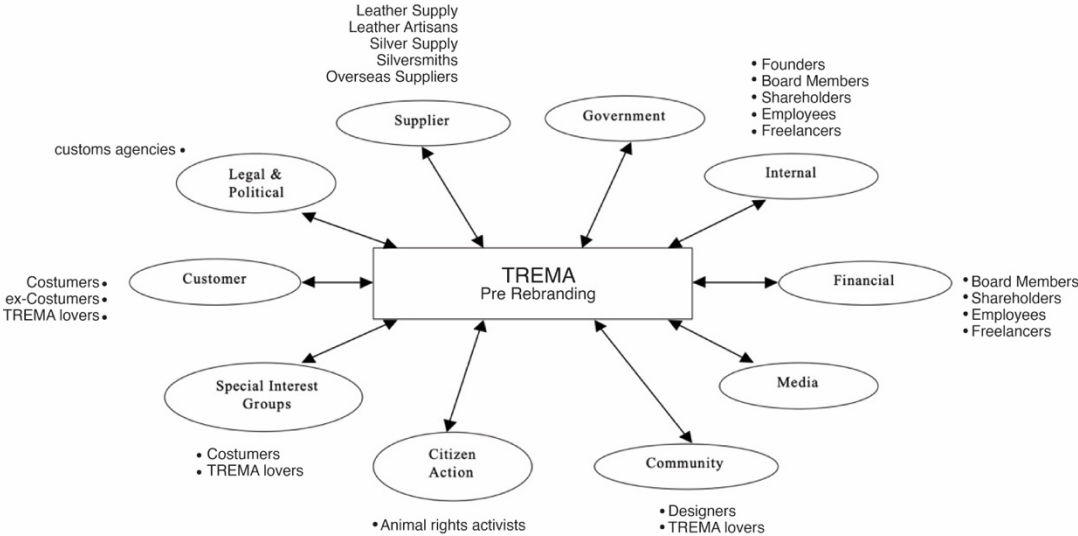


Figure 38: TREMA’s pre rebranding stakeholder map (Freeman, 1984:25)

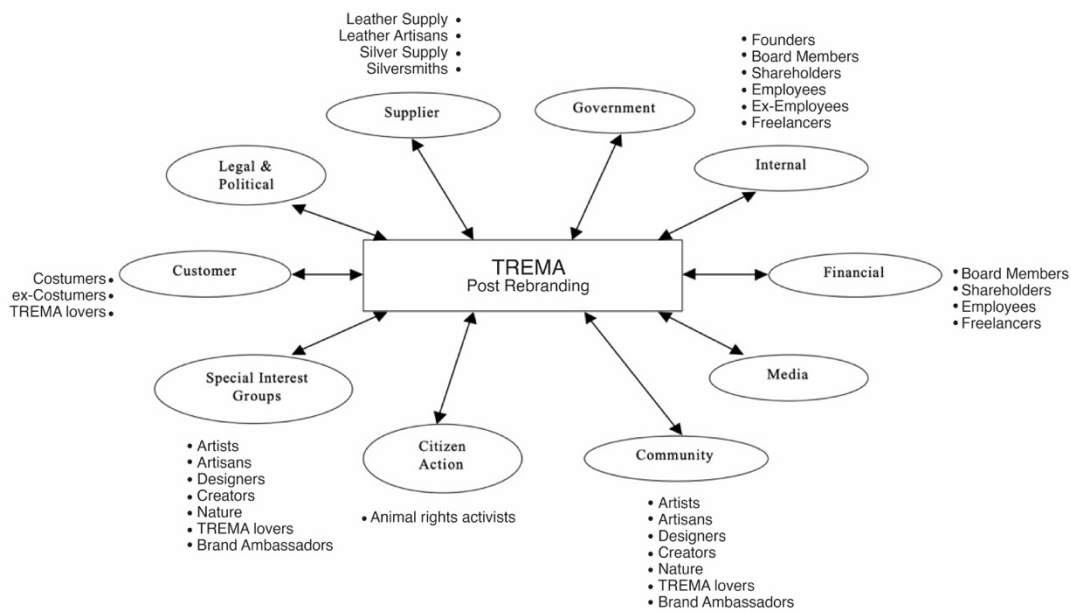


Figure 39: TREMA's post rebranding stakeholder map (Freeman, 1984:25)

The biggest difference in both maps is in the enlargement of the Special Interest Groups and the Community. This is the most evident proof of Trema's new stakeholder engagement strategy: the creation of a circular community of shared interests and values. As discussed in chapter 4.4., the shift in the brand's identity translated into a change of goals. Resulting from these goals (of community, curation, stage giving, etc) translated into a much wider stakeholder scope for these two categories. Stakeholders that were not considered to be so, before the rebranding, were now fully acquired and engaged with. Trema now not only wants to create a relationship with the consumer but also with creatives, artisans, and even competitors.

Nature, being one of the pillars of the brand, is now also considered a vital silent stakeholder. The overseas suppliers and costumes agencies are no longer considered primary stakeholders, as the brand now produces everything locally, in Portugal. Whereas nature became one, as it deeply affects and is affected by the brand, in terms of sourcing of

materials and even inspiration, but also in terms of impact. The brand now takes its relationship with nature, the environment, and future generations with great seriousness (this will be further discussed in sub-chapter 5.3., as this new relationship is referred to as the Green Relationship).

To verify if Trema's Stakeholder engagement strategy was impacted, Sequeira and Warner's (2007: 11) construct for good stakeholder engagement will be used as a guide of good Stakeholder Engagement practices. According to the authors, the building blocks of stakeholder engagement consist of eight components: stakeholder identification and analysis; information disclosure; stakeholder consultation; negotiation and partnerships; grievance management; stakeholder involvement in project monitoring; reporting to stakeholders and management functions.

From what was gathered from the conducted interviews and analyzed documents, Trema before its rebranding focused solely on engaging customers. As for the other stakeholders, relationships were contractual so there was no analysis of their stakes and needs nor was there taking into consideration their interests and concerns apart from the economical ones. After the rebranding, stakeholders were analyzed and their stakes and needs, as well as interests and concerns, are being taken into consideration.

“One of the biggest focuses now after the rebranding is engaging with our stakeholders. We have done two things: Ask them directly what they prefer, in terms of product development, look and feel, etc., and also we go to our stakeholders and ask them whom they think we should interview or collaborate with.” (I13)

Information is communicated to stakeholders, early on in the project and throughout its duration, as a way of involving them in the decision-making process to produce inclusive, meaningful, and adapted solutions. The way the brand implements this is through stakeholder consultation, either by going to them and sitting down with them or by online meetings. Sit-down consultations with stakeholders are planned out, documented, communicated, and followed up. Some of these consultations derive from the interviews for The Collective, others are a necessary step for the success of Trema's partnerships. These

strategic partnerships fulfill the interests of all parties. This is a key point to create value and, as mentioned prior, it is an example of the highest intensity of stakeholder engagement (Sequeira and Warner, 2007: 35):

“So far, in all the interactions I've had with Trema, I've realized that they are always very accessible and open people. There is, therefore, an opening for questions or exchanges of ideas. So yes.” (IE5)

Grievance Management was also positively confirmed by the interviews. All stakeholders praised Trema's newly implemented capacity to receive, document, and address their afflictions and concerns about a project or topic, throughout the entire life-span of the action at stake:

“There is an openness to explain a worry (for example, if I'm pressured with my studies and need a bit of a break) and to share and implement my own ideas. I would say that there is an opening for both dialogue and joint creation.” (II3)

“I always feel heard, and that when I say something in the group chat they will pay attention and help me resolve my problem.” (IE3)

“I do remember that cutting that interview I think at least three times, and then realize that I had permission to cut more it and I was very happy. (...)I had any extra thoughts or suggestions I'm pretty certain the brand would be super open to all of it.” (IE4)

Trema also involves internal stakeholders on what is taking place is crucial for uniformity, “team spirit”, vision definition, and value creation. External stakeholders' involvement augments transparency and credibility. Affected stakeholders consider themselves seen as well as their opinion heard and held valuable. To relevant stakeholders, namely internal stakeholders and partners have frequent reporting and consultations on environmental, social, and economic performances of the project.

“We have three WhatsApp groups: one for design, another for photography and video, and a third one with the whole team where we are always kept up to date on what is happening. (...) We also have biweekly meetings where we talk about all advances, future tasks, and concerns, as well as an excel with a working dashboard that is updated daily.” (II3)

“There is this discussion, there is a constant sharing of what is being done.” (IE1)

“I consider myself part of the brand, I can call and exchange ideas. I know that if they really agree, that's fine, but if it's not in the brand's plans, if necessary, I also know that they tell me no. I think it's pretty easy to make suggestions and to give my opinions, as a creative.” (IE2)

“(…) we have a group chat in WhatsApp and that's where we address everything that we have to discuss for the following week. What's happening, what do we need to do, what we are missing (…) We have weekly calls, where we update each other on everything that is going on and what we have to do for the following weeks. We also share a drive where we share every document created and discussed, and then we stay in touch to know all the decisions and the emails that are happening with the productions. So yes, I am very much kept updated.” (IE3)

After the rebranding, stakeholder engagement is now viewed as a project to be managed: with tracks, milestones, and progress reports. Trema provides certain relevant stakeholders exclusive to excel dashboards where they can be informed on important steps and milestones within their collaboration or partnership.

It can be concluded that, according to Sequeira and Warner (2007:11), the eight stakeholder engagement building blocks are now being implemented in Trema after the rebranding.

### **5.3. Relationship Marketing**

As a way of evaluating Trema's new relationship marketing strategy, Grönroos (1996: 9-12) three strategic issues and three tactical ones of relationship marketing strategy were applied to Trema's case. As the author suggests:

- 1) The brand's offering went from a solely product-based offering to a product and service offering.
- 2) The brand is now viewed from a process management perspective, requiring an ongoing relationship with customers, in which people require value in the total service offering;

- 3) Partnerships and networks were developed. Trema does not view competitors as adversarial, but rather as potential partners in a win-win situation.

As for the three tactical issues of relationship marketing strategy:

- 1) Trema continues to seek direct contact with customers, as relationship marketing is predicated on the concept of trustworthy collaboration with known customers. And continues to make the most use of available face-to-face contact with customers, as well as the tools provided by information technology, in order to get as close to the customers as possible (via Instagram polls, per example);
- 2) The brand is now working on building a database to segment the customer base, customize marketing activities, create profiles of customer types, assist with service activities, and identify high-likelihood purchasers. This database will serve as a tool for cross-selling and developing new product offerings and partnership advertising.
- 3) Trema has developed a stakeholder-oriented service system (not just customer-oriented, as suggested by Grönroos [1996]).

One of the bases of relationship marketing is based on developing partnerships and networks with the goal of mutual benefit. Relationships between competitors, or competing entities are referred to as alliances “Alliances must be a win-win, parties seeing each other as equals, as partners” (Gummesson, 2002: 160). One can differentiate Trema’s alliances from just collaborations when the relationship is planned for longevity, for the improvement, development, and benefit of multiple parties, outsourcing, and imaginary creations take place. This is the basis of The Collective mindset, to create symbiotic long-term relationships with stakeholders and like-minded creatives.

Derived from Trema's increasingly sustainable way of manufacturing its products and relating to its stakeholders, Gummesson's (2002: 122) Green Relationship is also applied. It is defined by the relationship between companies, suppliers, consumers, and society (amongst whom, is its environment) is based on ethics and good citizenship. For Trema, being now a value-driven brand, green relationships are inherent in their business mission and represent an opportunity for sustaining a competitive advantage. In this case, a genuine desire to be a good citizen exists. What seems to differentiate Trema's green relationship from greenwashing, are the values of nature, quality, heritage, and culture that drive the brand, the consistency of their environmental and health actions, and the expectations of customers.

#### **5.4. Research question**

The goal of this research was to answer the proposed research question: How is Branding and Relationship Marketing impacted by the methodology of Design Thinking? To answer this question, the concepts of brand (brand image and brand identity), relational marketing, stakeholder engagement, and design thinking were explored in a literature review; interviews with three key specialists in these areas took place; and a case study research at Trema, a brand that recently underwent rebranding (in which design thinking methodology has been applied). From the gathered information derived from the literature review, brand document analysis, and from the specialists' and stakeholder' interviews, it can be concluded that design thinking's methodology can not only impact but also help strategize relationship marketing.

Several companies today are switching from mass-market, product-only offering, and impersonal marketing to relationship marketing in order to target and establish engaging connections with stakeholders. However, the gap between their intentions and actual implementation can be bigger than planned. Literature has shown that the reasons for this

gap are, to name a few, the lack of data or inability to put together data in a meaningful pattern or map, random variables such as costumers, competitors, the general economy and technology change; and the little understanding of the needs and wants of the customer. Proposed solutions for these issues include turning marketing management into a more broad marketing-oriented company management, meaning that everyone within the company influences customer relationships in some way; long-term collaboration and win-win, meaning the creation of mutual value through the establishment of partnerships between the company's stakeholders; all parties should be active and take responsibility, to promote shared value every stakeholder must bring something into the table; and lasting relationship and service-based values rather than bureaucratic-legal ones.

Brand image has been concluded to be generally defined as the way stakeholders perceive a brand, what associations they create in regards to that brand; some of these associations. These are a product of the brand identity effects, as every encounter an external stakeholder has with a brand is shaped by how the internal stakeholders view their own mission. Given this realization, it is considered vital to include these internal stakeholders involved in the definition of the brand identity and as well as engaged, meaning having their needs and interests taken into consideration. In this step, stakeholder engagement practices are key to successfully implementing relationship marketing-oriented company management. A defined brand image and brand identities are key to successful and well-planned relationship marketing and stakeholder engagement strategies. These last two fields are both human-centered, relationship, collaboration, and empathy-based. So is design thinking, which reinforces the conjecture of its impact on the other fields.

Design thinking has been found to very effectively impact these plans of action, providing tools that facilitate logical decision-making and strategic planning in the light of a collaborative, human-centered, empathic, and interactive mindset. Taking as an example the Evolution 6 model and its six phases, a brief description of some of its tools and how they can impact relationship marketing's most common issues can be found in annex 1.

## **5.5. Future research**

In this case study research all proposed goals were addressed, but it is only a starting point to future research connecting relationship marketing, branding, and stakeholder engagement.

As relationship marketing is something that is built over time and tends to evolve, additional data should be available to do a follow-up data collection to investigate which central aspects change over time and which will remain untouched.

Also, to broaden the spectrum of analysis a possible research avenue is to extend the same research to other companies.

In conclusion, it is found useful for brands in today's global market to turn to a service-based offering, giving a voice to its stakeholders' interests and concerns, to create alliances based on mutually beneficial opportunities. This way brands will serve their community and environment as a way of thriving and making a difference. Design thinking can be of help in systemizing and informedly planning out how the needed changes will be implemented.

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## ANNEX

### **Annex A: Evolution 6 Model' tools considered especially impactful for Relationship Marketing**

1. Emergence phase, aids the identification of an opportunity or challenge:
  - a) Trend Observation, knowing which are current and emerging trends, by looking at changes occurring in businesses, lifestyle-culture or technology, either as Primary Research, visiting cultural Capitals/influential cities, or as Secondary Research, consulting the trends presented by data and market research agencies (this tool can help better predict the random variables' effects on a relational marketing strategy);
  - b) Opportunity Mind Map, a tool for radial data visualization, helps explore knowledge domain contents and to identify opportunities by creating a visual overview of a subject, connections between information, upcoming ideas, and challenges, and helps create guidelines for the setting up of a project (therefore promoting the ability to put together data in a meaningful pattern or map).
2. Empathy phase promotes deeper knowledge of the context:
  - a) Stakeholder Mapping, is a visual depiction of the various persons and organizations participating in a project in order to obtain a holistic perspective. The map's purpose is to aid in the creation of a plan for engaging the project's identified stakeholders and to anticipate potential challenges;
  - b) Field Observation, direct method of developing empathy with your target population. Observing individuals as they go about their daily lives reveals and deepens our awareness of significant behavioral patterns. Thus, observation enables the team to rapidly acquire expertise in the context of the project's users;

- c) Interviews, a versatile method for eliciting information on the attitudes, views, and opinions of interviewees regarding the study issues;
- d) Persona Mapping, creation of fictitious characters formed to represent a specific group of individuals by their shared interests and behaviors, derived from data gathered through field observation and interviews;
- e) Insight Map, a convergent thinking tool that assists in the organization of insights and learnings from Field Observation, Interviews, Personas, and the User Journey Map, to take into account its knowledge, vision/mission, routine activities, and expectations for the project, to gain a holistic perspective of the project's strengths, but also its shortcomings and threats (as discussed in chapter 4, it combines brand image and brand identity by analyzing what are user's and the organization's shared objectives).

### 3. Experimentation - Generating and testing ideas:

- a) Branwriting/sketching, two techniques for collaborative idea production, being a modification of the Brainstorming technique but not requiring a facilitator, allowing therefore group members to work autonomously;
- b) Idea Cluster, a tool that assists in transitioning from a divergent to a convergent phase by categorizing ideas and determining whether the idea creation process was flexible (with ideas in several directions and thematic areas);
- c) Evaluation Matrix, convergent thinking and decision-making tool for prioritizing and selecting between five and twenty options, by arranging the selected thoughts in a simple two-axis matrix to compare the quality of ideas using only two criteria throughout the validation process.

4. Experimentation - Elaboration - Working on solutions by transforming an idea into the best tangible concept:
  - a) Role Play, allows for the testing of interactions between providers and customers, enabling a team to sympathize with the project's end-users, providing significant insights for the development of ideas and concepts;
  - b) Concept Test, simulates concepts and solutions with potential customers, giving people something tangible to react to when your innovation project is still in its infancy enables your team to fail and learn quickly, prompt essential revisions to the concept, or inspire alternate solutions by providing a fertile field for discussion about future possibilities;
  - c) Service Blueprint, a chronological prototype of the process of developing a new service including backstage interactions (that are not visible to the service's user) and does not include an emotional assessment of the service, as this tool is used to design a new, as-yet-inexistent service;
5. Elaboration - Working on solutions to find the best way to explain a novel concept or material solution;
  - a) Storyboarding, frequently utilized when a sequence of interactions between several actors inside a system has to be thoroughly studied and described, involves a sequence of drawings or images that can help to emotionally relate the tale of a new product, service, or event;
  - b) Solution Prototype allows for the observation of consumers' interactions with a product/ service.
6. Extension - Putting into practice, observing, improving, and growing;
  - a) Implementation Map, a tool for determining the strategy and obstacles that will face the innovative project;

- b) Questionnaire, a series of questions designed to elicit data from respondents, and is used to analyze replies statistically;
- c) Feedback Map, a tool for gathering and visualizing informal and official feedback, provides a comprehensive summary of all criticism.

**Annex B: Semi structured Interviews to specialists – Paulo Dias, Katja Tschimmel and Rui Quinta**

**IS 1 – 18.10.2021**

**P:** Paulo, thank you so much for accepting my invitation.

Your background is in Management, Marketing, and Design & Creativity for Business Innovation. At the moment are the Chief Relations Officer at iMatch, a creative consulting company. You teach Marketing and Creativity at IADE – Creative University, in the Marketing & Creativity Management Course and the Business Innovation Course.

**PD:** To give you some context, iMatch started as an innovation company on the front end of innovation. Really dedicated to the ideation process of innovation. Me and my partner we came from fast moving consumer goods and then we worked in marketing and sales, in innovation... We met in Danone. From our experience, we felt that there was a lot of space to help people to get better and faster ideas. So we dedicated ourselves to help big companies to improve their pipeline of innovation. We adapted the methodology from IDEO, adding our own take especially on the inspiration part by putting people to see broader. That way we provided dots so that people could connect them, and new ideas could be born. Always user' centric/human' centric/ customer' centric. We started with the pipeline of products, then we turned to services then we were really working on creative problem solving as the challenges were getting broader and broader.

Relating to your dissertation topic, we have been working for almost 10 years with customer service with BMW, for example. Improving the customer service and customer relations. Both central BMW Portugal and also with the dealerships.

**P:** That's one question I wanted to ask you. Could you elaborate on this: You mentioned customer service, I believe, referring to relationship marketing...

**PD:** Yeah, there's always a connection there.

**P:** What has been the evolutionary tendency in that area?

**PD:** What we see is that there has been a lot of development because of automation and technology. The frontier between what is customer service and the customer experience, also in terms of design, there have been conceptual inferences. At the end, we need to design the best experience possible for the customer. So, when you are designing that for different customers, different personas, you have to consider all the organization. It needs to be all working connected so that you successfully implement relational marketing. The same effort that you put in working with the client, and have to put in other stakeholders. It doesn't matter if it is the sales rep, or the client,...

The frontier between what is marketing what it is sales comes after you've done the first sale to do a customer then you enter on the process of the relationship. The challenge is how you can really integrate the automated processes, the marketing processes and the the relational and personal processes. In fact, just finish a project we them, focused on the way they treat the digital leads and all the digital process that come with that. Also there's the CRM systems that they should all bind together. That is really important and it's a challenge. That area, the data area or the database which is where they are kept, the way they are built. When we're talking about the big company, if you are not getting data from your clients and if you are not getting consent from your client to use that data, then your

databases don't work. Then you cannot really do proper marketing. It's quite an important part these days, it's another semi automated process in which the human side still has huge importance.

**P:** How does design thinking play a part in that process?

**PD:** Our methodology, as we apply (and it's a design thinking based methodology, we call it creative collaboration) what we have are six phases. The first one is the immersion phase, in which we analyze and define the initial challenge. Then we have the inspiration phase, where we investigate others that have solved the same similar issue, maybe in a different business or in a different context. Getting some familiarity and maybe knowing ways how you can solve the same problem but in different contexts. Sometimes you are so immersed in your own problem that you don't see what others are doing. So we do invest a lot of time on that. Then we have the ideation, diverge and converge, solution and prototyping. When we get a problem, also in branding (even when we did our own brand) we always try to get people from complementary areas too can give their different perspectives. I mean even we as a company, we work like that: We have our full timers, our part timers, our some timers... We have people from biologists to lawyers, from different areas to get different perspectives.

When we are working with BMW, we are working with BMW headquarters and then we are working with the dealerships (the dealerships are kind of independent) so, we have to promote empathy between them. We have even hired actors, to represent a scene of customer service. The goal was so that they could really get empathetic about what was happening. We also worked with focus groups, gathering stakeholders of each dealership. We put the teams listening to the stakeholders needs and claims. These are other examples of trying to bring different perspectives.

Due to dealerships being privately owned, managing stakeholders goes from getting on board the owners of the dealerships (which are very important stakeholder) to guy that is in front of the garage greeting the clients. All stakeholders need to be aligned with the same

purpose and that is really challenging in a big company. As it goes from the guy that it's there and has to answer to the client, to the engineer in Germany that has to deal with specific problem that the car has... They are all connected.

**P:** By the brand identity?

**PD:** Yeah, absolutely. The physical car is just a small part of the value that the brand represents. You could go from place A to place B with any other car that is half of the value. When you're buying BMW, you are buying the expectation you have to the brand and a relationship you have with the brand. This relationship is present for example, when a client goes there to pick up his car. If he has a question, the dealer that is face to face with the client has to have an answer. Putting all this all these different stakeholders involved in this experience, together and aligned and focused to provide the best experience possible.

**P:** In this scenario, does Design Thinking impact the result in any way?

**PD:** Yeah, absolutely. We always to get that involvement aligned by taking different perspectives. As in specific tool we used, it goes from the Customer Journey, to the Journey Map, to Moments of Truth, etc. We are also working with McDonald's in the same challenge. McDonald's much more simple, and much more complex at the same time. Because the journey is much simple, but they have huge turnarounds being heavily impacted by technology. Now you can go to the restaurant, and you can order without having to stop at the kiosk. So you can do it automatically. What might happen is that you have the burger at your table and no one has smiled at you, yet. Or no one has looked in the eyes. That is a problem for the brand perception. Again, we are always trying to give them different approaches, different perspectives, promoting empathy through Journey Maps... We are working a lot on that.

**P:** Design Thinking's tools impact the perspective taking, empathy taking steps to get stakeholders aligned?

**PD:** Absolutely. We will know doing it also for culture design, which is one of the areas that in last years are integrating this human centric approach. We had already done it also towards innovation, to build a culture of innovation. We are not from human resources, we don't know those bricks that that builds a great company culture. What we do is putting people on a design process, collaborating, talking to each other. Often times not about complex things, as it's about the putting people that usually work side by side but they don't talk one another, talking.

**P:** So, you are saying that those tools and those approaches aid that situation in which a person buys a product, they're not buying solely the object but brand? So the front man had be able to explain to the customer what they are exactly their buying into, besides object?

**PD:** Yes. They have to understand that they are part of that service the brand provides, you know that you are that the client is buying.

The relationship emphasis depends on the brand's goal. Not every brand must be highly relational, they might be highly transactional and that's it. That is not a bad thing, in that it is not a bad brand because of that. But in my experience, designing a way of human centered branding really makes the difference in terms of the results we are getting. For many brands including ours that we are service, and it's quite differentiating.

**P:** How would you distinct relationship marketing for regular marketing?

**PD:** I would say marketing is a broader concept. It means making the market. Marketing, as a whole, is much more associated with reaching to the potential customer to understanding the potential costumer. Relationship marketing is much more out to how you should engage client, how should relate to them so that they stay as a client, and they gets to the happiness

point of the relationship with your brand, becoming almost an advocate. That is where they touch, Marketing and Relationship Marketing, because then the customer helps you getting into the market again as an advocate for your brand. For example we have brands that rely on this recommendation process derived from an excellent relation they have with the brand.

**P:** How do you manage and engage with stakeholders when undergoing the technological advancements you mentioned?

**PD:** It has to do with the adaption curve. Movements of change are always promoted by those that they are the innovators, the firsts to know. It starts by those that really adopt change first, and then the others come.

**P:** Can the adaption curve also be representative of a rebranding adaptation? Does design thinking also impact that adaption curve?

**PD:** In any way when you say the design thinking impacts, do you mean in the way that you conceive the rebranding process and how you communicate it?

**P:** Yes.

**PD:** A lot. I mean, that is what we are doing. We've done our rebranding and we are now in the process of starting communication. We went through the process of listening to the customers, designing personas, now we are building content program that goes directed to certain personas and to certain channels. This was all a design thinking process mixed with a sprint session.

For example, we took part last week in a project with Healthtech Lisbon, which are startups related to health. We had a design thinking process, where we gathered patients, guys from tech, etc. Altogether, combining different perspectives: the angle of the patient, the angle of

the technology, the angle of the health professionals altogether. There was this richness, this value created from the different perspectives. So yeah, I do think it's fundamental.

**P:** Well, I do not have any further questions. You answered all my questions and more. I'd like to thank you for your time. I'm just going to ask you if you'd like to add something that I haven't asked you, that you think might be relevant research?

**PD:** I would like to underline two things. One is, well, we have been doing this for 12 years now we have done many projects, hundreds I would say at this moment (now we are doing big events, for example we just did one with Microsoft called “Building the Future” and even there) the most interesting part is always the experience of bringing people together. (In Building the Future, we have a strategic consultative council, we have the sponsors, we have the speakers, we have the audience in which we have students. we have professionals, we have marketeers, we have some designers.) It's the way that you build this in a successful way is by reaching to everyone and putting everyone contributing. The second thing is even when the communication is digital, don't forget there are humans talking to humans. Don't have to worry if you have a lot of knowledge or you don't, if you go from this very simple and essential notion that you are talking to human beings, a lot of the barriers go down and a lot of important insights come up. This is crucial for the success of any project.

## **IS 2 – 19.10.2021**

Transcript Katja Tschimmel

**P:** Professor Katja, you are German born you have lived in Porto since the year 1990, you are a consultant and executive trainer, researcher, lecturer, coach and conference speaker in design thinking and creative thinking. You created Mindshake which is a

creativity and design thinking consultancy you started in 2010. You have a PhD in Design and a Master in Applied Creativity.

You published three books and created the amazing Evolution 6 model. You taught for 15 years at ESAD Matosinhos and you coordinated D-Think, an european project of Design Thinking applied at Education and Training.

**KT:** Yes that's right.

**P:** Would you like to add anything?

**KT:** Actually, when I did my PHD it was about design thinking. I started in 2002, and in that time design thinking was used as a cognitive process of designers. So in my research, I wanted to understand better how designers think when they think creatively, and how education actually could help them to make it more fluent, more original, etc.

When I finished in 2010 (I mean you see I needed eight years. But did a lot of things in those eight years, such as adopting two children) so my PhD took over seven years and then I defended a year later. What is interesting is, that in these years I did my PhD, the concept changed. So when I finish and defended the thesis, then I had a conversation with a friend and he was saying “Katja, you did your PhD about design thinking so why are not working with companies now?” At the time I was starting to develop my own model. But, at the beginning, my model (The Evolution) was a creative process model, it was not a design thinking model. It only had four phases, and we based it on the methodology of design so it started with Empathy, Experimentation, Elaboration and it finished with Exposition. Later, I understood that in the practice of organizations, sometimes, they even don't know when project starts. So then I understood that we needed another phase, which now I call Emergence, and we needed a sixth phase to help companies also through design thinking techniques in the implementation phase so I called the last phase Extension because I needed an “E” so now it's E6 [model]. So what is interesting is that I came from design and I really approached deeply design methodology and read the books from all the

classic design methodologists. And then I came to design thinking as an innovation model as it's used today. So I think that combination is rare. You don't find a lot of people who did both. Either they are academics or are they working design thinking in practice.

**P:** Exactly. That is why talking with you is special because you are the merge of the two worlds!

**KT:** Yeah I think there's not many people who do both.

**P:** You mentioned the differences there are between writing about a creative process implementation and then you switch to design thinking. Can you please repeat or maybe go into specifics on what's the difference between the two?

**KT:** The creative process or the mechanisms of a creative process, is the base of every kind of innovation process. Design thinking is a method for an innovation process to move better in this innovation. So there is no innovation without creative thinking, the creative thinking is the base of all. The creative process can be explained by its mechanisms (it's actually a continual process, an evolutionary process) with the established order to go from divergence you came to chaos, and through convergence you come to a new order. But it's not helping to be operative in companies or even designers. So we needed another kind of model which helped us to reduce the complexity of this process (the creative process). So a lot of schools or companies tried to find a way to simplify this complex process. That is how these models emerged. In the 70s, the scientific design community also did this but at that time the models were very linear. Meaning you had a problem and then you had a lot of steps, and then you had a solution. So we call it actually the paradigm of creative problem solving. But then, through new approaches and also knowledge from Chaos theory, from System theory, from natural science and from psychology. We understood that the creative process is iterative. Meaning that there are happening a lot of things at the same time, we have to go back and forth, so it is a loop. This is expressed very

nicely in the model from the d-school, from the design thinking school (Hasso Plattner Institute). They have these six steps model, with visual loops. For example. You asked me what the difference between the two is, so to resume: I would say they are different ways of explaining the creative process or the innovation process or the design thinking process but the bases are actually the same. When I teach design thinking classes, of course I present my students my own model the Evolution 6, but I always say “one model is not better than the other.” I really believe this, it's just a question of taste. It depends if you prefer a shorter model such as a model with three phases, like the one from IDEO [Inspiration – Ideation - Implementation]. Or you prefer the Double Diamond, where you see the divergence and convergence, with the four D's from the British Design Council. Or do you want one with six E's (The Evolution 6) I mean and then there's the graphic representation which helps the understanding of the process. So, what we try to do actually in Mindshake, based on my model, is to help the companies understand how to make it simpler. (One must not, however, make it too simple. If you only have three phases or four these and then nothing in between, people think “yeah is it only that?”) So what we try to show through our model that it is an evolutionary process. There's actually no natural start or end. There is the identification of an opportunity and then there are deadlines and there the project ends (because the process itself actually never ends). We also wanted to show, certain tools (which we haven't invented, there are a lot of design thinking tools available, such as Brainstorming techniques, Mind Maps, Journey Maps, etc.) are more opportune to use in certain phases. So, we showed (through the colors, for example) that the Mind Map, for example, is good to use at the beginning of a project. It is not a recipe, no model is a recipe. It is like a toolbox: you have a lot of tools, and then you have to learn and understand which is the best to use in which phase. That's what we're trying to do in our trainings, the model is a kind of guide to explore all of these tools and phases.

**P:** Do all tools need to be used?

**KT:** No, No!

**P:** I can, for example, for each project see what is useful for that case and in the another one adapt and see what is useful for the second?

**KT:** Yes. For example, when you do a training on design thinking, what you should teach is which kind of phases there are, what's happening in the process, which are the tools... But then also to explain that a certain tool can be used in this moment or in that moment. You can combine them.

That is why you don't learn design thinking in a workshop of eight hours in one day. Not even in three days! In that amount of time, you get a notion of it. Just like a cooking course, isn't it? When you do a cooking course you think "oh great! Now let me do it at home" and then you come at home and you think "oh God, how was it?". So, just like in a 3 days' cooking course, you learn something but you will not be a gourmet cook.

**P:** In your model, you even give a suggested duration for each step, right? So that people don't just say "OK, inspiration.. I'm inspired, check, next tool". No, you list a suggested timing, you even suggest taking a break and then coming back..

**KT:** Innovation needs time. It needs a lot of time for experimentation, it needs time for failures. Because if you really want to do a disruptive innovation, you will fail in that process. It is what happens when you try new things. If you don't fail, you are probably on your way to the incremental innovation, meaning step by step and little by little but you never will really innovate in radical ways. That is why when you are doing an intensive design thinking course, it is like an aperitif. You find out whether you hate it or you love it. Just like intensive cooking workshop, or any kind of workshop, if you fall in love with it and then you say "OK I want to learn more about this". You will not get professional in 24 hours but you get a notion about the dynamic, about some tools, about how important it is to work in an interdisciplinary team, etc. I'm not against these bootcamps or these sprints,

you learn a lot of things! We also do this in Mindshake, of course. But we should not overestimate it.

**P:** You mentioned the importance of interdisciplinary part. What I'm trying to really think about, is this human aspect and collaborative aspect that design thinking can bring to the table.

**KT:** Yes, we have even the Stakeholder Mapping in our model, to understand which stakeholders are touched by the project. Taking into consideration the topics you are researching, there is a very nice project you should look at. I did design thinking with a friend of mine for Aldeias do Xisto. We worked with craftsmen and we did design thinking with them and verified that they really improved their work. I will see if I find some links about this. But my focus there was not the branding, in this project my focus was to put designers together with craftsmen. The goal was to actually help craftsmen to transform themselves so that they are doing not only their craft in an artistic mindset but also to study what people want. So to develop empathy for their clients, which is something they normally don't do and that's why they have selling problems. So that was the approach, not a branding project but actually in this project they did do branding project but it wasn't my part. You will find something about this.

One of the projects I did in re-branding was for two state agents who had two different companies and they wanted to work together and rebrand completely. We facilitated the whole process, they found a new name for the state agency and a whole new brand. Normally, at Mindshake we don't do graphic design but in this case actually we did because we coached them in the whole process. We only do the graphic design part when it is part of the design thinking process, because we are not a design agency. So in this case we did and you can even see it. I will send you the link. It is in our work stories. You can quote it, even.

**P:** Perfect.

**KT:** When you look in the work stories there it is LMK, which is the new name of this state agents. LMK means ‘let me know’.

**P:** What would you say was the biggest input of design thinking in the rebranding process?

**KT:** I think it is related to the first problem we had. These two state agents came to us and they thought we would do the project for them. We're not a design agency, we are a design thinking agency. I said “You are part of the process, because you are the specialists of estate agency. We don't know a lot about it”. They said “OK, how much time will it take?”, I said “it depends how much time you have available? It depends if we're working one time a week or two times a week, if you're doing your homework..”. (Because then they had to do interviews and so on.) They really went in it, then we had in one Direction which didn't work, we failed in the process. They understood that what they thought would not work because we checked it by using journey maps, interviews, observations, ... And then they went in another direction. In the end we finish the process with success, and now they're working in their new consultancy LMK. I think the main outcome was that they really had to be involved in the process and now they know the result was their ‘child’. They didn't got it from us, they worked on it. That was really important. Now they have a new brand. I think the logo and the graphic solutions are nice. However, for me this was not the main outcome because any design agency could have done that without them. Perhaps in another way, but they never would had felt this was really their project, their company because they created a brand new company for themselves. They were only two people at the time so I don't know if now they're growing and if they put more people in it. I think we did this project in 2016 or 2017 so it was some years ago. Four years or something ago.

**P:** If you had to say in three or four words what was the real input of design thinking you would say...

**KT:** It was them knowing really their brand themselves, so: ownership. I would call it ownership. The collaborations, or better the co-creation. This was a co-creation project.

So actually since they were only two people and I realized that two people is not enough for doing a co-creation. So I put in the team a communication designer and I did all the facilitation work. It is also important that the facilitators are not giving ideas but really concentrating on the process. So I facilitated that and Mariana, my colleague from Mindshake, she was not doing the facilitation, she was part of the team. This helped in the visualization because these two people, one was an engineer and the other an lawyer, they didn't really had visualization skills or prototyping skills. That is the advantage when there's a designer in a design thinking team, for example. Sometimes people ask me: "When we do design thinking, is it necessary that a designer is present?" and I say: "It's not necessary. But it helps." If you have other people who are really good with mapping, with visualization, if they're not afraid to draw or to express themselves, if they have storytelling skills, etc; then you don't need a designer. If you don't, put a designer in your team.

**P:** I have two last questions. The before to last question is: According to literature I found, Design Thinking has a user centered approach. Meaning you define the person for whom you're trying to solve a problem, and you do everything around them. In this rebranding project that you mentioned, for example, can you tell me who was the entity you were trying to solve the problem for? Did you have one or several stakeholders whom you were taking into consideration while rebranding it?

**KT:** We had three stakeholders. We were facing three problems, not just one. The first was that they both had their own, individual company and wanted, together, create a new agency with which they both identify with. That was solved, they really loved the name. Let Me Know. Let Me Know... what you need. Let Me Know...how much time you have. Etc. They really loved LMK. And they were very lucky that the name was free! When you do this kind of new names, normally it's really difficult to find a free name. So, their problem - to put together a new agency which they both loved - was solved. So there were

one stakeholder. Another goal was that they wanted to work in a kind of exclusive way. They didn't want to have a agency such as Remax or any of these gigant real state agencies. They didn't want to be agents, they wanted to be consultants. So consulting who? Consulting very special clients, and consulting investors. Another reason that they needed a name in English was because a lot of investors come from outside of the Portuguese market. Thus, the second stakeholder group were the investors. I think with their name and the rebranding, they solved the problem of facilitating the communication. Before that, they had two names which no foreign investor would be able to memorize: one was, Imodi and the other was Resultado Óbvio. Make an English speaking person say “Resultado Óbvio”, come on, they could never. [chuckles] So, LMK is more straight to the point. So I think that was solved.

The third and last one were people who were looking for special houses/apartments, with special character. They really wanted to be consultants and try to help buyers to find what they really want and not doing a lot of visits (which sometimes happens in state agencies). So, actually what we did was interviews and observing different kind of people who had bought and sold real estate. Because they thought one of the problems was that people who are looking for houses think that consultants are double agents. Meaning they represent the buyer and the seller. And sometimes people don't feel comfortable with that. They really wanted to have a consultancy which was ethical, the ethical part was very important. This was also inserted in the new brand, this ethical part. Making so that people really feel that you are representing “me” [the client, the stakeholder] and not both [buyer and seller].

One of day I should speak with them, asking how it is going. This is a part of our work we sometimes, in our daily routine, don't find time to do. Which is to go back to our clients and to ask: “How was it?” I really should do that. That's a good idea.

**P:** My last question is derived from your answer just now: You mentioned three main stakeholders and three problems for whom you were doing the problem-solving through

design thinking. In practical terms, did you do, for example, a different tool for all of these stakeholders? Or you did you do each tool once, regarding to all of the three?

**KT:** By the interviews we found out that one of our hypothesis, because design thinking is also working with hypothesis, we found out by the interviews we did 50 interviews that actually what they thought was a problem was actually not a problem. The most important tool of all that was interviews and speaking with colleagues. They interviewed clients, people who bought or sold real estate, and they spoke in more informal conversations with colleagues from different agencies. They learned a lot with that and then we changed the direction of the problem space.

I think getting empathy which we call the empathy phase is the most important, where you really understand the different stakeholders, their problems, sometimes you think something is a problem but it's not, and you discover new opportunities and so on. Actually, that is what designers are doing less. The professional designer normally, after getting a briefing, goes immediately into the idea generation. This part of really emerging within their stakeholders, a lot of designers don't do that. I think this is really the important part in design thinking, that you really know well your stakeholders. And stakeholders is not only your user or your client. It also the company! I mean if you understand that an organization that was doing certain project has different expectations from the end user, then you have to find matching expectations. You will not develop a product or service which is against the cooperative culture of this organization only to please the users. From the point of view of companies, it has to match. So both need answers that match together. This we also do in the empathy phase.

**P:** OK so you would say the empathy phase impacts the gap between the brand entity - what the brand thinks of themselves - and the brand image - what other people and other stakeholders perceived externally?

**KT:** Absolutely. Actually, we have a tool which we call the Insight Map. It contains two sides: one side is representing the company or organization/brand side, and the other is the user or the end user. In the middle is a heart, representing the matching points. On one side we put what we observe, what we learn by interviews, etc. And on the other side is the mission, the vision of the company. It has to match! In design thinking, if you remember from the book by Tim Brown, a product or service should be desirable, feasible (from the technology point of view), but it also has to be viable, we need to consider the business part. If there's no business, why should companies then do all that? So, it goes: viable, feasible and desirable. If not, it would be an artistic project.

**P:** Professor, thank you so much for your time and for your answers.

**KT:** No problem, I am curious to read your work when it's ready.

### **IS3 – 20.10.21**

#### **Rui Quinta Transcript**

**P:** Rui, thank you so much for accepting my invitation. Let's get this interview started. You studied communication design in IADE – Universidade Europeia and design thinking in the Hasse Plattner Institut in Berlin. You founded several businesses, among which are With Company, a strategic design consultancy; Tonyo Studio, a space design consultancy studio that designs exhibitions for science and museums, amongst many other things; and Peixaria Centenária. You teach Design Management and Entrepreneurship at the faculty of Fine Arts, as well as Strategic Design and Creativity and Innovation at ISEG. You coached teams in Design Thinking and Innovation at Hasse Plattner Institut and you're a public speaker who has travelled all over the world sharing your wisdom. Would you like to add anything?

**RQ:** I'm good, I'm good with that.

**P:** I will start by asking you what is your vision of the concept of brand. What is a brand, to you?

**RQ:** That's a big question. I think it relates a little bit with the background. As a communication designer, I'm a visual person so I relate a lot with the shape of things and how things look like. I started by designing a lot of beautiful things, or things that at the time I thought were beautiful. My understanding of branding also started with that disconnection between understanding if the things that I was designing were actually working. Not only being beautiful but actually solving something or telling people something or making them relate with something. So I was designing beautiful things and I didn't know why. I had this big relationship with typography, for example, and I designed [brand] identities as part of the brands I was working for. But only from a visual aspect of the brand.

At a certain point, I just started asking more questions. Trying to understand things such as: for whom I was designing for, how can I design more with the client, ... As a way of trying to understand more about the business as a business and as the impact of the things that they were doing. There I realized that making more questions relates a lot with strategy. In the sense of thinking before you actually start doing or designing something. This might seem simple in theory but in practice is a lot harder to do. So, I started asking lots of questions and I started spending a lot of time with people who knew about brand strategy, who knew how to tell stories, who knew about brand positioning, who we knew about all of these specific concepts of positioning and strategy.

I created this idea of the brand self. Which is based on this model called brand key which is an exercise that sums up your main competitors are, what's your differentiator, what's what are your emotional and functional benefits, what's your brand essence, etc. This framework helped me understand a little bit more about strategy and understanding a little bit more about the questions that I have to ask before I actually start working on branding. I evolved

that idea into the brand self because I love neurosciences. I like the aspect of not only thinking about abstract things but actually thinking about bodily states and how can a branding interact with you in the real world. How can a brand not only appeal to emotions, but actually touch people. How can you create a space that interacts, that reflects the brand that interacts with people. Then it goes back right to the start of the visual. From design and shape onto abstract thinking, and thinking a lot in general and about concepts, about strategy and then going back to design again to actually impact people not only with messages or key messages that have a meaning, but also that are important to us. I look at brands as bodily and mental and mental states that actually interact with people.

**P:** You mentioned two key aspects of brand, brand identity and brand image. This brings me to my next question, in your work, does design thinking shorten the gap brand image and the brand identity? The gap between people perceive of your brand and what you really want to transmit or how you want to interact with those people?

**RQ:** Yeah. Going back to the brand self, if you read Damásio, who is Portuguese a neuroscientist who has have been influencing a lot of generations of neuroscientists. Neuroscience does not just happens in your brain. It's something that actually goes from your brain, to your body, into your interactions and into your physicality and your existence in the world and with others. So, you are made of the things that you experience and you are made of the things that you experience with other people, and through other people. You are made of these emotions that are generated between these interactions, between the learnings, between your knowledge, between everything that you have gathered throughout your life. And, again, it depends on you. It depends on your character, it depends on your education, it depends on the social network that is around you. So, I am what I am because I was born in a certain context and then I was influenced by a bunch of things that define me. I think that a brand can be that, in a way. It has to have an idea behind it, and it's influenced by the creator of that idea and their the beliefs. It's not only about words and it's not only about feelings and it's not only about the essence of the brand. It is about the voice,

it is about the way you express yourself. Just like a person has a way of speaking, a brand also has a way of speaking. A brand today, is movement. Is sound, is interaction. If you think about video, per example. It is not that the brand is explained through video, it's every little interaction of you and that specific video that defines the brand. In my opinion, that is the [brand] self. The brand self is built not only with abstract words or abstract feelings, but it is built on intentional interactions that go from the voice, to the image, to the movement, to the sound, to the way you are provoked by this entity called brand. Just like you would be provoked by a person. A brand is not only what it says it is or what you see, a brand is an existence in the physical digital space today. When we actually take time to ask the necessary questions and to develop the tools needed to take a brand in that direction.

It is easier for me to go from personal experiences, from case studies. I like to build these answers from those concrete experiences. I studied communication design, I evolved into being a brand designer and a brand strategist, and then I discovered design thinking in Berlin. I was the first student of the HPI Academy to actually join IDEO, which is one of the most well-known innovation agencies in the world. I joined IDEO in Munich, to become part of the first team in the world that was connecting design thinking and branding. From the beginning, we could see a connection between the design thinking process or mindsets, the way a designer does things and the way you feel these things while building your brand. That, for me made total sense. Things like engaging with people, talking with people, not starting from the design but starting from behavior, from the needs, from trying to identify what people need, what people want, how do people perceive your brand, how do people feel when they interact with your brand. Going from understanding behavior and then designing on top of that. Coming up with a strategy, and then designing from that strategy that answers all of those needs, all those questions. It is based on following a process of understanding, you know, like trying to understand to whom are we making this brand for.

At With Company like we have this brand triangle that solves everything for us.

**P:** Can you tell me a little bit about it?

**PC:** Yeah, it's a triangle in which you have to look at three things when you are designing a brand: you have to look around, at what the market is like, you have to analyze the competition so that you are able to establish differentiation, so you have to know the companies around you, who they are, where they are, what they are selling, what are they doing, what are they saying. You have to look at the competition, so that you can understand if you are different. In which way you are different from them.

Then, you have to look at people. So, you have to look at the clients, you have to look at the user, you have to look at the people that interact with your brand and find out their needs. You have to understand what's important for them. What are they searching for. The word is relevance. You have to find out and understand what is relevant for them.

The last side of the triangle is the organization. Here, you have to look at yourself and what you have to find in yourself what stands out. If you don't find the truth, you just following something. You are not being original, you're not you know bringing anything new to the table.

When you cross all of these things, you will find out something that stands out. That is about you, it's about your beliefs, about the impact you want to make in the world, about the good things you want to around you. When you have these three things, I think you have you have the essence or you have the purpose or you have something that it's in the middle. In the middle of the triangle is the differentiator.

To me, the branding process is about making questions, is about involving people on the way. You cannot define the values of a company, you cannot define the purpose of a company if you don't talk to the people who actually run that company. You have to understand them. You have to sit with them. You have to understand for whom you are you designing this brand. You are helping them and they're helping you. You cannot imposing anything, you are not bringing your good taste into it. In design thinking, you are bringing your good questions. You are understanding first, and then you have to design. You have to involve them in order for you to be able to do that, you have to involve them. You have to sit with them. That's magic. One of the incredible things that happen is that we help them

reconnect with their purpose. When you go to these stakeholders and you sit them around the table, what happens is that they start to think and to discuss. They start to discuss things that normally are stuck in drawers. Suddenly you are just facilitating these moments where people start thinking about things that they usually don't discuss with their colleagues. Or even why they're going to work every day. What's the meaning of their brand.

There's an interesting question we make every client which is: if you're a company closed doors tomorrow, what would people miss? There, they start to think “What can I give people beyond the functional benefits of the product? What does my brand represent? What does my brand stand for?”

**P:** This brand triangle you mentioned, is it a creation of your company? Is it a With Company creation?

**RQ:** Yes. It was developed by Juliana Lubianca, who is one of our senior strategists. I have presentation that I can send you with that information.

One thing that is an assumption about design thinking that is not accurate. Is that now there is this movement now that says design thinking is a human centered design process. Meaning that it focuses only on people. I believe that is one of the problems of this narrow definition of design thinking is the fact that you are not focusing other stakeholders. Such as the planet, the broader network of connections your brand has, the connection people and their environment, between people and other forms of being. To me, this is the next level discussion. The problem of marketing is that it has connotation of, it seems to imply that someone is trying to sell me something. Of trying to impose something on someone.

Design thinking has gained a lot of popularity in the last years, with a lot of people wanting to bring those principles to the way they work. I think that is valuable, really really valuable. But in terms of the branding of design thinking, I think it will not survive the next generation of problem solvers. Because the problems go beyond people.

**P:** That brings me to my last question. Do you think, when undergoing a design thinking process – considering that it has a user-centered approach - we can substitute that “user” word by “stakeholder”?

**RQ:** That makes total sense. Me, as owner of several companies, I hire other people. I have to treat them the same way, with the same focus as I treat my clients, per example. I have to be really solid, in the way I manage these interactions to make sure they align with the principles of the brand.

I love the idea of designing for the future. The future people who are going to interact with your company, with your brand, with your product in some years. I like that approach. It brings the idea of networks, it brings the idea of systems, it brings the idea of, you know, interconnectedness. Interconnectedness not only between people but also within ecosystems, meaning those that are affected and affect your company and your brand. Yes, totally. I understand the complexity of that, of bringing these topics together and project the ideation into the future.

For example, about image: there's this tendency that shows that the logo as the basic form of identity is disappearing. It's more about the truth, what these brands are as self. This was a huge in mindset.

Brands understand what people want, should understand why people are changing. Brands need to realize they can have something that fits that search. What happens at this point, it that there's a disconnection at this moment. Because if what you have to offer is purely functional, it's not enough anymore. This is why it's important for you to understand that like you have to offer not only the function, but you have to be an ally. I think the word ‘ally’ is interesting because people are becoming more and more activists, in general. And this alliance that can be created, puts pressure on both sides to create value. Alliances between people and brands have to be created. I'm going to give you an example which is: we just designed the new strategy and repositioning and rebranding for Fula oil and Oliveira da Serra Oil. They're going to be launched in the beginning of the next year. Oliveira da Serra, launched a project in which you would buy a bottle and then they would give 1 euro to help

people get through the pandemic. People are struggling now because they were laid off, they don't have as much money to buy food and this was their way of forming an alliance and helping those stakeholders. The secondary result, was that it raised brutally their sales. What they did, was that they gave people the possibility of making a better choice. It's the same olive oil, it's the same liquid, it's the same color, it's the same taste, but they give people a chance to make a difference. This is a perfect example of a brand that in an ally, and is aligned, with its stakeholders. Not only in terms of product offer but in terms of beliefs. In believing that they have to be better, that they can do better. If brands don't do things differently we're all \*\*\*\*\* . This mindset is what people are expecting more and more. This alliance, this activist way of branding. If brands don't take this seriously, they will not survive. Most of them will not survive. Because we will demand that from them.

**P:** Thank you so much, Rui.

**RC:** Thank you. This was cool. I really liked your questions, I really liked the path you are taking on relationship marketing, of moving a little bit aside of the word marketing and bringing other fields to add relevance to word marketing and what marketing is, and how it is perceived. So I wish you all the best luck.

## **Annex C: Semi structured Interviews to Trema Projects' Internal Stakeholders**

### **III – 26.10.21**

- Founder & CEO

**Tell me a little bit about yourself, about the coming to be of Trema and about what do you do within the company?**

I am the founder and CEO of Trema. When we started the project in 2014, the goal was two young entrepreneurs who wanted to create. I come from a family related to jewelry and therefore I very much appreciate going through a learning process that allows me to gain experience that can later play to my advantage. We started by finding accessories that we would like to make and that were related to jewelry, but not necessarily. But also accessories in general. We started to design different pieces and that's how the project began. The meaning of the word Umlaut means "that which separates", so the umlaut between two terrains is what separates the two terrains. So, deep down, it's what to separate. It's also related to the fact that the first bracelet I designed, our best known product, the B1 bracelet. This bracelet has two dot beads, and these two dots say umlaut which is an accent

What I do now in the company is I makes decisions on to what should be created. In our company, everyone at the creative part of the team can bring input so I'm basically the person who holds the final decision on what is being done, and the look and feel of it. Basically a creative direction. Then I also do the commercial strategy and most of the copywriting of the brand.

**P: Going back to the beginning, when Trema started how was the physique of the brand, how did the brand present itself externally?**

When I started the brand when I was much younger. This was almost ten years ago, and when I started what I wanted to do with the brand was a bit of an extension of my own perception of beauty. That was something very important for me, so initially I created the brand with the focus of being in line with what was the aesthetic appeal that I thought it was relevant back then. I would say that in the beginning, the physique of the brand itself and how it looked was very minimalist and it was very brutalist, in a way. Meaning it had a lot of very steep edges, a lot of corners, triangular shapes. A bit vampire like, even. With time, I understood that what should prevail is not something that looks good because it's stiff, but something that looks good because it's soft. It is with that in these with that in mind that we moved from point A to point B which was difficult but we arrived to a beautiful place, I think.

**In terms of personality, how do you think the brand communicated itself to others before the re branding?**

Now, what we are aiming to create is more a brand for let's say the cool adult. By cool adult, what I mean is someone who is attentive, knows what they like and is attracted to aesthetic this. We aim to create products and visuals that you can relate with. To put it in a metaphor, it is like a book with a beautiful cover. An attentive person can never be indifferent to it. That's what we try to do: a very beautiful book with a very beautiful cover ,with a very strong narrative inside. Thich takes time and also obliges us to have something in mind which is: for you to be able to move forward and to adapt, you need to make sure that your prior convictions can be challenged every day.

**What would you say is the difference between the ideal customer then and the ideal customer now?**

Now, we are now we are really on a mission. The mission is to give a stage for people who deserve a stage, but don't want to or can't achieve it, for some reason.

Before, what we wanted was not coherent with what we were putting out there. I start feeling the incoherence when we made the decision of designing and selling steel bracelets that were imported and not locally made. They were cheaper than our handmade, locally made, up-cycled accessories and they looked nice, so they sold really well. However, this to me was not aligned with our purpose because they were objects with no real meaning behind them, no hand-made marks, no personality. I noticed that the consumer we were attracting was again people that just wanted to look cool, and I realize Trema does not resonate with that, anymore. Me, as the founder I was no longer interested in having that value proposition. I wanted to bring people who could not be just customers, but also could understand that they could join our community of cool conscious people. I realized that the costumer I was looking, must be also looking for us. People who maybe are disappointed at fashion today, that believe in locally made ethical objects have value added.

Now, we're also focusing in the part of curation. Which is something we are working on through the building of a data base of close group of clients, artists, artisans and designers. Now, we look for talent and we try to present that talent, we try to understand that talent and make an alliance with them, a symbiotic relationship to establish a win-win connection between us and this network. So, we collaborate and/or partner with this talent by creating pieces and/or showing their work on our platform to give them visibility. What we get in return is fresh input and the creation of value through like-minded people trying to make meaningful and sustainable objects.

**How did the collaborative way of doing things came to be?**

**How did you turn to this collaborative way of doing things and why not just keep hiring people to do the work for you?**

There's a difference between making things for money or for yourself. This second one, we discovered leads to the creative person really put your soul and all that they are on the object. They own that creation. It's a product of their passion and hard work. This promoted ownership. What we can give in return besides monetary compensation, is a chance for dialogue and for alliances to be created. When you bring him a collaborative mindset people immediately have a different approach. They are open to listening to each other, to sharing visions and experiences. They create alliances with each other, and with our brand, in order to create a common strategy to move forward. I want to find people that together create something better. Bring something relevant to the conversation. Even if we don't quite know what that will be yet! If there is a connection, a common interest, a safe place to discuss ideas and get creative, it is a a kickoff for many other things that we yet don't know what it is but I'm sure that he will arrive to a good place.

**What does Trema give to creatives in trade for their talent, that they perhaps wouldn't get on their own?**

One thing we give them is visibility. Trema has existed for a few years, we have a certain level of traction within our network of clients and press that pay attention when we present someone whose work we love. The second is we share with them everything we know we share with them. My family has a workshop of artisans that is 250 years old, so we really understand the struggles creatives go through in understanding how to market themselves. Through these relationships, we present to them the same chess board that we use to sell our own products. Many times that's just the kickoff to something better. We aim to create a collective of stakeholders creating value and meaning.

We always hire people for specific objectives. But my dream is to engage with those stakeholders in a way that each of them represents a circle and that the collective is a Venn Diagram. As opposed to having a lot of circles that are separated unconnected with the with a line that is monetary compensation. By creating this alliances, we want to show them that:

if they have doubts they can ask; if they have ten ideas for the same problem it doesn't really mean that they are dispersed it means that they have a lot of ideas and that we are here to listen and ideate. In the end it's about being available to listen to people and to give them our best from what we've learned so far. There is a lot of synergies, a lot of serendipity that happens from coming to someone and saying to them: "Hi. I love what you do. I would really would love to get to know you as a creative, to understand what you do, how you are adding value and if together we can increase that value creation." For me, what is important in regards to the relationship with all our different stakeholders is they understand that have a place where can they can feel safe to create, where we can discuss how to create more value together than separate.

**Would you say empathy is relevant in that communication process?**

Oh yes. Definitely. Empathy is key here.

**What do the terms brand and brand identity mean to you?**

I'm not from a marketing background, so you won't get a lot of insights from me regarding marketing terms. But, for me a brand is a name that represents whatever that a specific business does. Brand identity parallelism I make is with someone's personality is someone's identity. You can be a name, but who you really are is you represent, how you behave, what you stand for, etc. For me that is the brand identity.

**Before the rebranding, what was Trema? What did it offer?**

Well-made accessories. I always had this notion that accessories are a bit of our personal ambassadors. We started by creating long lasting objects, that were locally handmade with industrial leftovers. Trema has something which makes it very special for me, within the products. Before the rebranding and now. Which is: we created things for people to enjoy themselves. We believe that beauty should not be an someone else's interpretation, it should

be something you do for yourself. People that use our bracelets like them because they really think get better looking by using them, they feel that the accessories are stylish and nice. The goal is to create this logic of objects that can somehow love you back. Emotional value plays a big part in the way that our consumer relates to the purchased item. I usually compare the feeling in adulthood of having a favorite object with you at all times with the feeling of having a favorite toy, as a kid. It is a part of you.

So we knew the direction had to do with sustainability, with the aesthetics, with precious metals, with upcycling leftovers.. so we had all these pieces of the puzzle and we knew the direction but did not know how to get there. I believe sometimes in life the most important thing is when you know the direction, just keep moving even though if you don't know if there's a road that will lead you there. You just need to keep moving in the direction that you know you should move.

There was that there was a moment after creating products and selling products that we understood that there is a big lack of communication and a big lack of good commercial effort done by people who create objects with love and care, such as artisans. So, we in our rebranding we aimed to create a solution for two different things: to create and curate.

Firstly, to create products that are meaningful, either because they have a social or environmental impact or because they have an actual physical meaning. So in terms of the 'create', as we kept moving in that direction we created a lot of different accessories such as: wallets, purses, bags, backpacks.. everything we could create with rescued leather and also with silver things such as bracelets and charms. So, this is referring to the part of creation which was something that came from before the rebranding, from the genesis of the brand.

### **How did Trema stand out when compared to its competitors?**

That's a good question. I think it is our mission, is what we want to. The difference is that in the beginning we were also much younger entrepreneurs, so we were a bit clueless as to

how to actually explain this to our consumer. Our competitive advantage was that at the time, and even now, there aren't many brands that offer responsible products that have a neat design and that can last for a long time. With time we understood that we're trying to do is to create objects that mean something. The world does not need more objects. To me, creating accessories for this sake of creating accessories has little value as there is already too much junk in the world due to fast fashion. We realized we wanted to create objects that, when you looked at them, you could be reminded of something which perhaps is important for you.

### **What was Trema ideal user? Was there an ideal user?**

When we began Trema, we were young and it was the first time that we were doing something like this. That translated into the brand not having a real structured communication from top to bottom, or a well-defined strategy. We had an initial business plan, that had a persona of Trema that would be the typical client. At the time, that persona would be 'the cool kids'. At the time we want to create a brand for the 'cool kids'. That was the necessity back then. I think the brands reflect a bit of what the founders want and I think that when we were young we really wanted to be cool kids.

### **How did Trema wanted to make people feel, when using Trema?**

Our accessories are not made to make people want to fit in them, or with them. Each costumer makes it their own, through the emotional bond they create with it. This is our intention, to create it was to create objects that people could feel like they it was their own. They could feel stylish, it could make them feel prestigious because they were using a designer's accessory, it could make them feel thoughtful and good about themselves because they were using upcycled leather.

### **What did Trema symbolize?**

Aesthetics and responsible consumption. We were just a doing high-quality product offering brand. Before, our consumer created their own motivation because the products

had a functional value, mostly. They value for money and they were mostly aesthetically pleasing, handmade accessories.

**Did you have a slogan?**

I don't think so, no.

**Can you recall any of Trema's marketing actions from before the rebranding?**

We never did any marketing efforts, per se. What we did was only posting our products to social media. I think back then, we were just putting beautiful pictures on social media of our beautiful objects and they were selling. We did some giveaways and try to get a bit of traction. But apart from that, we never really did anything.

**What was the established relationship between brand at other stakeholders at the time?**

Back then our internal stakeholders were people whom we were paying a salary. As for and our external stakeholders' relationship was either the established mandatory one of service requirement and payment (with artisans and suppliers, per example) or awareness actions such as social media posts, word to mouth and presence in events. Back then we were learning how to establish and manage real relationships with our stakeholders. We were trying to understand what were the difficulties of producing something, how we could you create a relationship with an artisan, even though we order limited collections so they were making little money and we needed to keep him motivated to work with us... That was pretty much the focus back then.

**Were there any marketing actions or communication efforts directed towards those relationships between brand at other stakeholders at the time?**

We created company presentations to show to the people we work with what we're doing. Apart from that, no.

**Back then, did you seek direct contact with stakeholders?**

Before, most of the people we worked with were a service we hired. So the contact was mostly bureaucratic.

**If the Trema you first knew was a person, how would they be like? Use adjectives.**

The same persona as our ideal client and as who we wanted to be back then, the cool kids.

**According to you, what was the common goal within the company? What did you want to achieve?**

The common goal of the company was just making the right product and trying to make your way into the market. The honest answer is we want to achieve sales, we wanted to sell which we still do now.

Back then the objective was to allow the team that was involved to keep developing beautiful things. This was the main motivation since day one: to develop things that you can show to others and they can understand that what your team does is being able to turn trash into something amazing.

**How did you assure quality and proved credibility?**

I come from a family that has worked in the jewelry and silversmith business for 250 years. In my life experience I have always been taught to perceive what is good quality and what is not.

**Now, after the rebranding, what is Trema? What does it offer?**

The main difference is offer is that we don't we not only create but we also curate. We look for talent and we really believe that: talent working together is his nature doing its thing.

The cross-pollination of talent creates amazing amounts of value that people don't even understand it's possible. There's a lot of serendipity and lot of good things that come from putting together people that want to create. Using each other knowledges and skills, the value added it's much greater than the products themselves. I would say that before we were a product centric company, and now we are people centric company.

**Now, how does Trema wanted to make people feel, when using Trema?**

We want to make them feel responsible, for not contributing to fast fashion and supporting responsible consumption and local artisans. We want to make them feel special, because everything we do comes in limited edition, handmade, and comes from the collaboration of artisans, designers and artists. It is created with love.

**What does Trema symbolize?**

The coming together of people, sustainable consumption, meaning and symbolism.

**Do you have a slogan?**

The slogan that I like to use is: talent working together is nature doing its thing.

**Can you recall any of Trema's marketing actions from after the rebranding?**

We have email newsletters, brand presentations, social media presence, We mostly just have our product in shops that sell. And we have clients that really love our product so they see it as very good option to buy, and to gift.

**Would you say was the goal of those marketing actions, now?**

Our marketing goal right now is to build the database. Containing relevant people that want to receive the message we are trying to pass. We want to create a database of people that resonate with what we are doing and have interest in taking part of our project. Being consumers, artists, artisans, designers, suppliers. Once this data base is elaborated, our

marketing directions will be directed towards the relationship between Trema and those people who care.

**Have you developed new partnerships now? More than before?**

Yes. Our value proposition now is attracting a lot more people who want to talk with us and do things with us now. A big part of our rebranding was creating this collective mentality. The collective is everyone who cares. Meaning they can clients or our special clients (people who help us to understand what we should and shouldn't produce or people that give us feedback) or they are people that do things in a special way. So, artisans and artists who are interested in something together with the materials that we collected that are considered deadstock.

**II2 – 26.10.21**

**Tell me a little bit about yourself, how long have you worked within the company, what do you do?**

I'm a fashion designer. I took the course at the Faculty of Architecture and for some time I couldn't find a job. It was then that I created a mini company with a friend. Afterwards, however, I got a job in the accessories area and started to focus more and more around there. I was in Vila Nova which is a fast fashion brand that belongs to the Tifosi group, working on accessories, also for Tiffosi and etc. In the meantime I left, came to do a master's degree in art education and halfway through my master's, that is, at the end of the first year, I got a job at Trema in Lisbon, which was also in accessories, it was in Lisbon, where I ended up staying for 2 years.

It was actually a spontaneous application. I was looking for work, and I sent my CV to several companies, and meanwhile I discovered Trema, which I didn't know and then I realized that several friends from my circle of friends, here in Restelo, already knew Trema,

where I ended up make a spontaneous application and they set me up for an interview and I stayed. They weren't exactly looking for someone at the time, but it turned out to be handy. This was in 2018, at the beginning of the year, at the end of January, 2018.

And in the meantime I left, to become more freelance and have my project, the idea being to launch my project with my sister, who also has to do a bit with accessories but a little different, not so much in the fashion area.

### **What do the terms brand and brand identity mean to you?**

For me a brand, this will all be a bit cliché, but it's a fact, a brand, imagine you don't need to be tied to a type of product, or a type of language, but you have to have it somehow an identity, that is, you have to have some goal and even though you don't always have to do the same thing, or you are very limited, you always have to have your identity, it has to be always there and always present.

I don't know if I make myself understood very well, but a brand is almost like an identity card, in which any product has to show what you are. In other words, sometimes it's difficult, it's very difficult, like you want to do something completely out of it, and even so how will the client realize that it's yours.

And that's difficult, but I think that's the challenge of creating a brand, which is always having your own there, like your i.d. Your way of seeing things. Even if it is for the materials, for the design, for the communication. Anything must have your brand in mind.

If this is not the case, the brand doesn't go very far either, because after that it passes by the side of people, they may like something one day, but then they don't identify or don't understand the path and passes by. But I think it's a little bit like that.

To create a brand, there has to be an identity, each concept needs the other. To create a brand you have to have an identity, unless you want to do something ephemeral, you just want to sell a product. But if you want a brand to last, I think so, that they complement each

other and have to live together, if you want it to last, brand and identity are related, and if you want it to stay in people's minds.

**Before the rebranding, what was Trema? What did it offer?**

I didn't know much about the brand until I entered it. I realized my friends already knew the brand, so I realized their vision there and then. And while I was inside, I witnessed what Trema was.

**Did what your friends said about Trema match with what you verified when you joined the brand?**

Yes because when I joined the company, there was not much more than met the eye. I remember people saying they liked it, that they knew that Trema had wallets and bracelets, (especially the sphered bracelets, which was what they sold more of at the time.)

So that Trema was a project of 3 friends who got together to do some cool things, and that was what came through to the outside. It was just one thing they were doing, which was that they offer was a bit more than just the bracelets.

I joined the brand, I realized that Trema still wasn't what the founders wanted it to be yet, and that was when they started to take it more seriously, even to compensate my hiring.

From there it started to gain more strength. However, I believe in the eyes of the public, Trema didn't develop much for many years. Because we took a long time developing products. The products that have been released now, were ideated like at the beginning of these 2 years. So there was a lot of stuff in there that went back and forth, back and forth, and things were never being released to the public. I think the rebranding was great, to draw attention and for the existing audience.

For me, the new identity already existed, but it took a long time to get out here. Also because it had to be worked on a lot, we had some trial and error. All this time, we inside already knew that we had to go around that, and we tried a thousand things, wrong things,

everything, but it only transpired now, for the public. I have this feeling that it wasn't until the beginning of this year that it took off.

**How did Trema stand out when compared to its competitors?**

I think it stood out, a little bit for the type of language, I can't explain it well, for the type of language. It was a very light language, very beautiful, very aesthetic, minimalist. There was little product, which is also good sometimes. This product is also very simple, very linear. It stood out from other competing brands that sold too many things, or that their own product was not exactly the same, it was too elaborate. I think that Trema has always had good in this, for wanting to go to the essential minimum.

Then I think it already distinguished itself at the time, despite having very little. Minimalism, in the end, I'd say.

**What was Trema ideal user? Was there an ideal user?**

Trema was trying to reach consumers outside Portugal, with a little more money. Consumers in their late 20s, up to 30. People well off, with money to buy a slow fashion bracelet or a wallet which was a little more expensive, but with good quality.

**If the Trema you first knew was a person, how would they be like? Use adjectives.**

It would be just like Vicente. Meaning someone who is doing well in life, who has a good job, has medium to high buying power, who is dynamic, likes to travel, likes to meet different people, who is in touch with his creative side, who looks for quality things, who likes to spend money on good things and not just ephemeral things. I don't exactly see artists buying Trema, at the time at least, but people who have that kind of sensitivity to detail, to creativity, that's it, but if you want me to be really specific, I saw a type of person like Vincente. I've always seen more men, but when we started designing the new

collections, which just came out, I saw that targeting a lot more women, too. But before, he was very much a man, that's all.

**How did Trema wanted to make people feel, when using Trema?**

The idea was for it to be a whole experience. Receiving the product at home, packaging, good taste. Okay, at the time that was the idea that we wanted to have an experience, and to have a Trema wallet, as it had different colors, and different patterns, inside, and it had a bracelet, I think it was the whole thing of wanting to do it. Wanting to provide the customer an experience. The idea was really that, it was to give the consumer an experience and show that the product they had received was really unique. There wasn't much quantity of each product, since they are all limited edition. So the goal that by receiving it, an experience was provided.

**What did Trema symbolize?**

Quality and simplicity. There has always been a big focus on using quality materials and the big quest has always been to look for the ideal material and the ideal way to combine them, so I think quality is what is above all.

**Did you have a slogan?**

I think we were trying, but there wasn't even a specific one, so I don't think so. There were some that were being tried, that were being explored, but as far as I remember there was not a steady slogan.

**Can you recall any of Trema's marketing actions from before the rebranding?**

We did giveaways. but that never worked very well. Plus, we tried to do Black Friday campaigns... For Christmas, we did a catalogue for friends, family and special clients. It contained a code with a discount and a contact number to perform the sale. So this was a little action just before Christmas, about 2 weeks before Christmas, or 3...

**What would you say was the need for the rebranding?**

It started because we no longer identified with the font. We even talked to a designer at the time to change the packaging as well, and we almost had to change to some things she made and we asked her to make us a catalogue. Afterwards we didn't like the catalogue. We realised that after all, it wasn't just the logo that needed to be changed, that maybe the communication on Instagram also needed an adjustment, because we didn't have a great focus and we were posting just things we found beautiful. Then I think that it also began to realize that maybe the type of customer no longer corresponded to the target... We started noticing things and putting the pieces together.

**What was the established relationship between brand at other stakeholders at the time?**

We had relationships with the suppliers and artisans, mostly contractual.

There wasn't a long-term relationship, for a long time. When I started doing product design, we reinforced these relationships mainly with the silversmith and the leather craftsman. And those relationships were kept going, it was important to say, even because we had a lot of things still in development, or they knew we were going to have it, and I kept them informed. There is now more constant communication, because my job was to be in constant communication with suppliers, whether to ask questions or ask for help with something, even if to ask for other suppliers of other things.

**According to you, what was the common goal within the company? What did you want to achieve?**

I think it was the ideal product. We were constantly thinking, devising and developing the ideal product. You were always jumping around, and there wasn't much direction. I think it was the ideal product. We were constantly thinking, ideating and developing the ideal product. You were always jumping around, and there wasn't much direction.

**People don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it" – Do you agree with this quote?**

Yes. I think things have a purpose. I like the accessories area, because it makes the product much more useful, and much more thought out for those who are going to use it. I identify with that, although I think that a lot of people in my area probably don't... I like to do things, not only for aesthetics but also for their usefulness. Doing things thinking about what the consumer will need and what I think I can offer them, and what I think they might need. In the future

**What would you say is Trema's "why"?**

Although Trema's products are very simple, they were very thoughtful. They were always thought of from the point of view of: this will work, or it will not work. This is going to be helpful, or it's not going to be helpful. People are going to want to use it with this material, or this material is too heavy, and not usable. In other words, everything was well thought out, also for its usefulness, despite the products being very simple, themselves, and things don't need to be full of clutter to be very useful and practical, that's was Trema's why.

**II3 – 28.10.21**

**Tell me a little bit about yourself, how long have you been working with the umlaut and what do you do?**

My training is in architecture. I got to work almost 4 years in this area. I've always loved photography and I'm now finishing my master's degree in photography.

I first came to Trema with the intention of taking pictures, and then it was realized that I could formulate a kind of strategy to give a new identity to the brand. Until then, Trema was a brand with ecological concerns and the reuse of materials, but which did not yet assume an identity. It offered some products that people recognized as being from Trema and this is notorious. Before working with the brand, I noticed that people recognize the

name and ask “that brand that has leather wallets? That brand that has bracelets?” Even without an established identity, the brand image was already settled in the minds of the target audience, which already identified and recognized the brand.

So, the first conversation I had with Trema, with the team, was about doing a session, an editorial. Then I realized that they were looking for a person who also had the ability to help with the graphics. So I started working as graphic aid at Trema in July 2020.

**Now what is your relationship with the brand?**

In the meantime, I decided to focus more on photography, so I'm a freelance photographer and work with Trema on that basis.

**Do you remember any marketing actions by Trema before the rebranding?**

I remember Trema being a brand I already knew, probably seeing it at markets and fairs because that's the image I have most of the brand before joining the team. I also remember seeing several people sharing Trema's Giveaways and I remember Trema being a very active brand on Instagram.

**What was Trema ideal user? Was there an ideal user?**

The brand was once more exclusive than it is today. It was an era more focused on special customers, because they had limited collections. The ideal consumer would be people with some financial capabilities, so it would always be a luxury brand and I think this is also due to the fact that at that time they only made products in silver and leather, and not steel per example.

**What would you say was the benefit someone would have by using a Trema product/service, then? (Functional, experiential or symbolic)**

One of the benefits that I think is a constant at Trema today is the quality of execution and the quality of the materials. As part of an ecological assumption of reuse, these are always very good quality things. These are pieces that promote an experience because they reflect

the perfectionism, care and taste of Trema's founder. Vicente, who is a person who does not only allow a reasonable product, must always be something impeccable and that he would buy himself. The quality and durability of the products is a benefit that distinguishes Trema's products from similar products from other brands. Another benefit is the concern with reusing the leather. Leather is very complicated material, controversial to say the least, and not for everyone. Having the concern of reusing leather that already exists, and that would go to waste if it wasn't up-cycled, I think it's different than producing leather. I think these were the benefits: quality and an ecological concern.

**If the Trema you first knew was a person, how would they be like? Use adjectives**

I thought Trema was a brand for men. Despite being unisex products, which anyone who wanted to use but I identified with a male brand and I think this was notorious in all the first graphic and photographic content. It was a more minimalist look, formal, not very colorful. At the time, the brand would have been a man. Then I can show you an editorial that was done before entering Trema that I think perfectly translated the man who is assigned. The brand would be a businessman, who dresses every day in a suit and tie but who makes up for the fact of being closed in an office every day with a taste for nature and the outdoors. This taste only takes place on weekends, when you can take off your mask to be what you really like. He is a classy person, with good taste, who likes to feel stylish but has an adventurous side in search of a connection with nature. He's a man in his 30s. Who likes to be in nature, to be active, to do sport and always something connected with the nature of the surfing or climbing style. However, he is a person with status, who insists on using beautiful things, on showing that he has quality things, he is very aesthetic and even vain.

**Can you relate to this person?**

No. What I just described is not what makes someone relatable to me.

**What do the terms brand and brand identity mean to you?**

I think one follows the other. A brand aims to be its brand identity. I remember when we did the rebranding of Trema, that people I knew knew about Trema before, they even wondered if it was the same brand. Despite having the same name and the same symbol.

**In your opinion, what was the common goal within the company? What did you want to achieve?**

I remember talking to Vicente about the brand when I entered, and he told me that the brand in the beginning only served his purpose to reproduce certain objects that he already liked and that were his in the past but that he couldn't find nowhere else. It was a brand with a functional character, that he liked a wallet that he could no longer find anywhere and that lasted him for many years and was of great quality. And from him taking this drawing, redoing and making this portfolio. Probably the man who is Trema, for me, might be closer to Vicente. Trema, at first, was a total mirror of what the founders of the brand were.

**What was the established relationship between brand at other stakeholders at the time?**

I think there was a great effort to reach the right suppliers and very real people: in other words, the objective was to reach, for example, not a large factory but a specific artisan who was very good at doing a certain thing, like working with silver. There was this concern, related to what I've already mentioned about the characteristics of quality and durability. But not much else. For the people around Trema, it was not necessary to convince them too much because as products were beautiful and functional, with limited qualities, and had quality to last a long time, that was enough. This changed when steel was introduced into the brand. The quantities became larger, reaching more people with whom the brand had no relationship and who did not know how to have for some time.

The people who are part of Trema's staff are sensitive people with very human concerns, so it's hard to think that they were just contractual relationships. However, I think that

nowadays there is a much greater concern to integrate these people in the whole process, including the sale. In the past, relationships had more to do with bureaucracies and production. Nowadays, I think the goal has become for the Stakeholders to be part of the whole process. From product ideation to sale.

**How did you assure quality and proved credibility?**

With the many times the prototypes went back and forth. They are only approved after many details were corrected. Vicente is the deciding ‘eye’, he is the person with the aesthetic concerns of the product’s and brand's look. He doesn't allow things to be done more or less: if it’s not perfect, it doesn't even come to the public. This is how they guaranteed quality. Quality is also guaranteed in the choice of leather, because despite being used, they are chosen by him, in the factory, with care and attention. There's nothing that doesn't go through it. Credibility is ensured because Vicente, the founder, comes from a family of jewelers, he is the 7<sup>th</sup> in a father to son lineage of learning of the silversmithing craft. Miguel, the co-founder, ensures the quality and reliability of the leather up-cycling because he comes from a family of clothing designers.

**How did Trema stand out when compared to its competitors?**

The brand has always surrounded itself with people who believe in the brand. A lot to do with the networking and contacts of the people involved.

**How did Trema wanted to make people feel, when using Trema?**

Being products made in very few quantities, people felt unique because not everyone could have this or that bracelet. I think they felt important and unique. They felt they were giving a vote of confidence in buying a Trema product. As if they felt they were supporting a small business, but that one day it would still be very well known. As if they thought “I will be one of the firsts to own this product”.

**Did you have a slogan?**

I do not remember. If there was, it wasn't strong enough for me to remember it.

### **Where did the need for the rebranding come from?**

The brand is growing at the same time as its founders. I think the board members have grown to a different place than when Trema started. They began to have concerns about the meaning of what they were doing and about creating value. They realized that if this project was to continue, they wanted a brand that would mirror their values and vision.

I remember before I started working with them that they asked an outdoor designer to redo the brand's visual identity. When she presented the result to them, they realized that it wasn't just the look that had to change but also the whole identity and mission. They realized that they had to create a disruptive innovation. That they had to revolutionize the concept of the brand.

### **What did that revolution consist of?**

First, a greater inspiration from nature. The relationship with nature intensified a lot. One of the most used slogans at the moment is “Inspired by Nature”. Perhaps, because of the pandemic, the businessman had time to fully integrate and immerse himself in nature. I would say at the outset that it already was, because of ecological concerns, but I think that now even in the more organic forms, in colors, in design, in communication, it has much more to do with the Trema of now. He is no longer a businessman who is only in contact with nature on weekends, to be a constant relationship with nature, with the latter serving as the basis for the ideation and design of the pieces.

Second, the concern to make known to artists or people that the brand would admire. Therefore communicating knowledge, visual culture, meaning and symbolism. The revolution was also the need to integrate other people, who do not necessarily have to be in the core team, but who are always bringing in enriching the brand with other perspectives and collaborations.

### **Now, after the rebranding, what is Trema? What does it offer?**

Allows more people to have access to products. Right now there are more exclusive products, and products for everyone. So now the brand is for many types of people, whereas in the past it was just for one type of person (of a higher buying power).

**What is Trema ideal user now?**

More aware people. Who buy stuff thinking about its meaning and their symbolism. People looking to surround themselves with art, to learn about the stories of others through a product, in the hope that they will add value to their own life stories. This was something that didn't exist. Trema is now looking for people who do not buy just because it is beautiful, but who buy not only because it is beautiful but mainly because it reminds them of something that is important to them or any concept they want to carry into their life and remember daily.

**What or how does that user feel, when using Trema, now?**

In the past, people would look at a Trema accessory and immediately recognize it as being from Trema, because the product spectrum was so narrow. By increasing the amount of stuff we produce, I think it's become more difficult to recognize Trema in new products. I also think it's a matter of habit, of the new identity getting into people's heads and becoming present.

By working together with artists, jewelers, outsiders in general, and whom we believe in and admire, we are bringing new ways of thinking to visual cultures. This will translate into less simple, more elaborate products. I think that Trema's consumers feel that they are participating in a community, in which they work together and in which they themselves were probably part of the design and production process of the pieces. That's where I think Trema's message changed. It's a thing for everyone, it's not a thing for the creator of Trema. It's a more inclusive, collaboration based cause.

**Now, how would you describe Trema? What would be the first words that come to mind?**

The first words that come to mind the pillars of the brand: nature, quality, heritage, design and culture. I think that in this aspect the creation of an identity was very successful, because I believe that the brand is representing exactly that.

**If Trema now was a person, how would they be like? Use adjectives.**

Now this question is not so easily answered because Trema became a collaborative Project, so each collection related to the collaborating creatives. But, it's funny because for me now the brand is a genderless person. Maybe it's a woman who identifies with more masculine things, or a man who identifies with more feminine things. It's not binary. I find this interesting. It is a free person, someone who wants to be in contact with others and with nature.

**Do you relate to that person?**

Yes. I think it is a mirror of everyone involved in the Project at the moment.

**What would you say is the benefit someone would have by using a Trema product/service, now? (Functional, experiential or symbolic)**

The ecological concern remains. Therefore, we continue to reuse materials, especially skin. By buying Trema's creations, it allows the collective to continue and therefore allows it to continue bringing artists, stories, pieces, works of art, processes, etc. The fact of continuing a project like this, I would say that it is creating value.

**How does Trema distinguish itself from competition, now?**

By creating alliances with the competition.

**Would you say empathy plays an important role in Trema's relationship with its stakeholders?**

Empathy is very important in this discernment. Putting ourselves in the shoes of the people who are looking for us, and thinking that they need what we can give them, totally makes a

difference. The fact that we interview a lot of people, that we understand other ways of thinking, I think it's trying to put ourselves in the other's shoes. I think Trema has a very empathetic team in practice, we do it because we know what other people have to say and what they have to add to the brand.

**Would you, as a stakeholder, trust Trema for more than product-related business?  
(Related to service or collaboration / partnership, for example)**

In my case, I'm more interested in partnership and collaboration than in the business part. Despite being a Trema employee, working for Trema and earning money from the brand. But my connection is much more emotional. I now believe in the project. Before, I believed in the person behind the project, but not in the project itself as it was when I arrived. Trema gave me the opportunity to realize one of my projects (O collective) and to materialize that dream in a real newspaper, where I interview artists in their studios and share their work. I study photography and I realized that one of the things that interests me, even to create empathy with those we work with, is the more documentary side of photography. This side consists of perceiving people's processes and ways of thinking, perceiving the workplace and the way this place translates into the things they produce. I've been learning that artists' studios are the mirror of what they do. The collective's newspaper or blog consists of interviewing people we admire, who have values similar to ours, documenting their workplaces. We go to meet them and interview them, as a way to offer the public content that is not just content for the consumption of products but for the consumption of art and culture, and at the same time we give artists a platform to have visibility and possible new partnerships. Thus, going from a product-only offer to an offer of a service. In order to bring other ways of thinking, and to give our audience access to the magical worlds of the people we interviewed. My contribution to the collective came from bringing together the type of photography that most interested me with the identity where we wanted to arrive to. If you go to Trema's website, for example, the collective is something that has a lot of prominence. It's basically a kind of newspaper, a way for us to also show how we think and what we believe in. The collective is a work that we are not even sure will make us any

kind of concrete profit. It certainly contributes to the website's traffic, it contributes to the new image and to pass on the values we want to pass on, and to meet and dialogue with creatives we admire. It's a way to make known the work of these artists, too.

**Do you feel that, when you have a concern or need regarding your connection to Trema (ex: collaboration, The Collective' interview, freelance work, consumer, etc.) you can go to the brand and trust they will receive and address your concern appropriately?**

Totally. There is an openness to explain a worry (for example, if I'm pressure with my studies and need a bit of a break) and to share and implement my own ideas.

I would say that there is an opening for both dialogue and joint creation. The hard thing sometimes is to separate the professional from the personal because we all end up becoming friends.

**Would you say you receive updates on the developments of your connection to Trema?  
Ex: Does Trema consult you on advances and performances, such as environmental, social and economic performances of the project?**

We have three WhatsApp groups: one for design, another for photography and video, and one third one the whole team where we are always kept up to date on what is happening. If I'm not aware it's my fault, ahah. We also have biweekly meetings where we talk about all advances, future tasks and concerns, as well as an excel work dash board that is updated daily.

**Can you recall any of Trema's marketing actions from when you first came into contact with the brand?**

Yes. One of the biggest focuses now after the rebranding is the engaging with our stakeholders. We have done two things: Ask them directly what they prefer, in terms of product development, look and feel etc, and also we go to our Stakeholders and ask them who they think we should interview or collaborate with.

I remember one of Vicente going on vacation with his girlfriend and publishing the trip every day, therefore sharing the link between the umlauts and nature and the integration of bracelets in nature. A kind of report on the creator's own trip, this was cute and brought people closer to who is behind the brand and the places where the brand goes.

**“People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it” – Do you agree with this quote? If so, what would you say is Trema’s “why”?**

In my case, the reason I work with Trema is that I am free and encouraged to explore the art that I like the most, which is photography. It is also knowing that the way in which I'm going to explore this art is beneficial for the brand. I end up joining the two things, the useful and the pleasant. I'm doing what I like and that is contributing to something bigger than myself. It's something that I'm not doing just for money, it's an emotional and personal project too, and my why is also reinforced by the friendship that also binds US together.

**II4 – 29.10.21**

**Tell me a little bit about yourself, how long have you worked within the company, what do you do?**

Hi Piedade, thank you very much for this interview, and for this opportunity to be here talking about a brand that is very dear among us, Trema. Moving on to talk a little bit about me. I took my Masters in Marketing Research, so mostly, where I started my stages here, which are not work, very based on Marketing Intelligence, to create here basically with a study of consumer behavior, always where my focus and interest have been. for the academic passage, or for the labor part. I worked in several multinationals, ending up a bit in a more operational part of the CUF company, where I did a bit of Project Management. At a Cuf Cascais hospital, but as I said earlier, I started in the business part, I've always had a pet here, for doing my own business, and Trema was a project I embraced, I would say 6 years ago.

Trema already existed when I entered. It was very recent, it was a year old, but at the time it was a project that I fell in love with, not only because I identified with the products themselves and with the idea of the brand, but also because there was a little bit of joining values. Values that I shared with my partner, and that have a lot to do with this familiar. My partner's family has worked for 200 years in jewelry, with Leitão and Irmão, and mine has experience in the fabrics, leather, the more fashion related part, and I felt that we could thus recreate synergies, and according to our know-how, which our family has built over the years, we were able to raise Trema to other levels.

And for that, that's how we started Trema, when we started it was a concept, and nowadays it's another, but I think that's also why we're here to have this conversation.

**And what exactly do you do in Trema? Besides having co-founded the brand.**

I am co-founder of Trema and the business administrator. I manage everything that is the administrative part of the company. I deal with accountants, whether in court or in the management of the company. I do the budgeting of all products, help and support in everything that is the creation of content, since the rebranding I have been supporting everything in the creation of our online channel. In the structuring part of the website, even in all the logistical parts, even for a little bit of that. I've also been giving support at our the offline channels level, namely in the stores. We try once again to use the synergies here, and already resources that our families have, bearing in mind our products, both in the Traces of Me stores , and in the future, in those of Leitão e Irmão

**What do the terms brand and brand identity mean to you?**

Brand is, in my view, what we create. It's what derives everything from brand entity, brand equity, etc. But that's basically what, when we have, we create our golden circle, our values mission, we create in a brand. Usually we have to think first, what do we want to give, what do we want to offer, and then we create the brand. And then the identity is the way we are going to show it to our consumers, customers, partners, etc. That's why the brand, I would

say is our base, it's something more internal, it's the vision we have of ours and the values that we think the brand has. Identity is how we're going to communicate it, to people. So both are linked, but they can clearly have different views, because we can have a much more internal idea, much more of our goals, and the way we present it can have a completely different concept.

### **How did Trema stand out when compared to its competitors?**

Trema's products were very connected to nature that contributed to a sustainable future, and that's why all our products that we made not only had the Portuguese brand, but also have the idea that, they were all up-cycled products, as we used to say, the consideration mainly of leather goods too, we had here products in which we basically used fabrics, leather, which had already been used by other brands and had been left out. Our idea was not to create large-scale production, large quantities, it was to create limited things. Things that could mean something to the customer.

The idea that our products have, they last forever, that is, they have an identity. A person who has our product can have it in 20 years, 30 years. And that's why they have a quality for it, and it also has a history for it. And that is why, in our way and the way we wanted to do it, we are not going to be doing something fantastic, megalomaniac, with 400 wallets, we are going to make, perhaps, 50 wallets, but rather wallets that have meaning. Wallets that have quality, not only to last today, but to last 10 years from now. And it's a wallet, a bracelet, or another type of product that we produce, which would adapt to each client.

We, at a certain point, had the idea, and a part of marketing that we used was asking our clients to show us their wallet, when they first bought it and after a few years, to take a picture, to be able to show people with an evolve portfolio, and the skin becomes more worn, the skin can change, sometimes even a color or tone, but it doesn't lose quality, it simply changed, evolved.

We had to talk about the background, for us it would make perfect sense, and that is why we based ourselves on jewelry and leather goods, but always with the idea of products that will last. Me for example, I have the B1 bracelet, this is a bracelet that, it's not the newest, most recent, isn't it, but it's a bracelet that's been with me for many years, and it's fantastic when I see photographs from years ago, it is always there on my wrist. And that is why it is a companion who is with you present in our life. And that is our goal, products that last and products that have meaning for the person, in limited edition, and quality things and with the sustainability factor.

### **What was Trema ideal user? Was there an ideal user?**

Customers, who really felt the value in the quality of the product. In other words, people who could touch, and felt the difference between a product like this and that of a competing brand. And that's why people who really looked at these products, and really saw something here, with affection, isn't it, that's why not to be used and in a year's time we'll have others, but people who really had an identity, who really thought it would thus be something they could count on.

In more technical terms, these are people from a more upper-middle social class, who look for these products in places where they have some meaning, where they really have some relevance to the whole environment around them. And so, for the most part, we focused a lot on the offline part, we had an online one, but an online one just a little bit more with a presentation, more like a link between all our social networks, and basically based a lot here on the offline part. That's why our customer was a customer who was looking for products that identified with them, and wanted to be with them for a long time, and it wasn't just something to use for a while and later drop.

### **How did Trema wanted to make people feel, when using Trema?**

The idea is that we want them to feel that they were a little part of the brand, and that's what we also did through our social media, our channels of communication, from posters or

flyers, you name it,. The idea was , really, to say this is a product here is identified with you, it's a product, basically, that is made, not only in national terms, as I've already said, but it's also a product that will be with you in a while , I do and reinforce this idea a lot, because for us it was a logo that was important to us, a product that lasted for ever. And that's where we really built a lot, and that was the idea where we wanted to touch customers. You will have a product here, which you buy, which will last a lifetime. And that's what we wanted to make customers feel when they bought our product, and that's the kind of communication that we'd like to do. Very, once again, linked to nature, sustainability, nature, but also that in these places, in these things, which sometimes very few limited things, could last a lifetime.

**What image do you think people who buy Trema have of themselves? Have a product? So what kind of people do you think are going after our product? How, in particular, do you think it's more masculine? or more feminine? What age group? What do they think of themselves? What do they like to do?**

Demographically, I believe that our product is a very unisex product, although the idea and the analytical trend really shows that we have another target of women here. The age group is being with a person, they start to have a little bit of purchasing power, I would say when they start with a job, from 25 onwards, but I would say and then there is no imitation in terms of age group. If I had to create a range, I would always say between 25 to 50 . Here, several segments are generated, but in sociodemographic terms I have no doubt that our clients are independent people, with taste or opinion, people who look at a brand and identify with it before buying the product. Not just a consumption type and who basically want to show their own position.

**What did Trema symbolize?**

Long-lasting, sustainable, and nature.

**Did you have a slogan?**

No, we never used a slogan, we used it in a transition, the slogan that we still don't know if we want to continue using: “looking good, feels good” We wanted to mark a transitional moment for the brand. We haven't quite reached where we want to go yet, so we never wanted to get stuck.

**Can you recall any of Trema’s marketing actions from before the rebranding?**

**Would you say was the goal of those marketing actions, back then?**

They were always a little bit offline. We always tried to be present at certain markets and certain events. Momentarily we had some Christmas, valentine's day campaigns, but in terms of marketing actions, I think there was more presences at events, such as markets. It was something that we were naturally doing, we simply wanted to show our product, and the way we created it, and at certain times of the year to give greater emphasis to increasing sales.

**What was the established relationship between brand at other stakeholders at the time?**

The idea is to talk to our customers. The idea was, and is, to make them feel a little part of the brand, and it was based on this idea that we evolved our rebranding.

We really want people to come and talk to us. Relational marketing was what we were really looking for, but naturally, we didn't bore the customer, we didn't send thousands of emails. We simply talked to them, to see if they liked the product. We were creating these relationships with our customers.

Our way of talking to our stakeholders has always been very intimate. We speak directly to them, in the markets, through our stores, on our social networks, namely our Instagram. Then we talked to people, even many times the purchases were made through conversations we had with them, clarification of doubts, giving rise to follow-up, so our relationship with them was very close. When we launched products, who had access to them, and since we're

talking about limited quantity products, it was our customers. We sometimes sent customized catalogs to our most loyal customers, loyal people, people who wanted to know what's new, and that really, most of all, when we released something, we got a response and feedback..

**How did you assure quality and proved credibility?**

We showed that our products were all made in Portugal. This communication took place very directly, face to face. Often, when we were personally with them at our points of sale, we would encourage them to feel our product. And because of that, all our communication was very direct. Whenever we could, we were face-to-face of the customers, it was easier, because the quality also stands out, often, for the touch, for the feel, even for the smell in the case of leather. In the online part, we had to tell a little bit of our story here. We focused a lot on the quality of the handmade, on Portuguese jewelry and leather goods. In the fact that the materials used were from sustainable leather because they were upcycled, we only used premium leftovers. We do not use leftovers from any brands, we use leftovers from really great quality brands, made by artisans from the Portuguese textile industry.

**Visually how were your communications for example on social media? Were they very different?**

We would love to reconcile our products with nature. To show that simplicity (one of the words is very much linked to the beginning of our brand, simplicity. If I had to say again what Trema symbolized in a few words, I would say it was simplicity, long lasting and nature.) Simplicity, for us was a part of the entity. Simplicity was what we really liked to show. therefore, beauty often has to do with things that we sometimes neither know nor perceive and is by our side. Having a leaf in the fall, with those bright colors next to a bracelet, in our view made a fantastic combination. That's why we didn't just use the traditional methods of putting a pretty model to wear with bracelets or wallets. We communicated all the products by using nature. We put wooden set ups, at the foot of a

bush, etc. These were ideas that we continue to use today, because we're still very attached to nature.

### **Where did the need for the rebranding originated from?**

The rebranding came from these ideas, which we have already mentioned here, what we liked was to be with our Stakeholders, to have their opinion, to join them. From creating alliances and through collaboration, creating value. We love and are immensely proud of being a Portuguese brand, and of products of Portuguese origin, but we realized that we wanted to be a brand of the world, we want to communicate, we want to communicate with everyone who has a vision like ours. So we decided to invite these people to work with us. We decided to give voice to art, simplicity, to a group of different artists. That's when our rebranding began.

The look followed this universal and global desire of ours. We have a lot of respect for the look we created from the beginning. I think it's a strong brand, our E with the two little dots represent a lot of symbology that is very characteristic of the brand. Hence the same symbol continued, although the concept had changed. We felt that if we wanted to evolve, the visual part had to evolve as well. And so, in a way, modernize our typography a little bit here and, consequently, our own logo. Now it looks less rough, more elegant and unisex.

The second part of the rebranding came from the products, namely the creation and enhancement of symbology. We value simplicity, durability, quality, but now we also value the associated symbology. All of this, once again, the result always with what we say, that is, what we want is for people to relate and identify with our products, and for that they find it beneficial for them to have some symbology. For when someone uses this, let's say this pendant, think “this pendant has a symbol for me. It has a meaning, not only because I like it, not only because of my taste, but also I identify with what it represents.” So the products are also evolving, our products that we are creating, not only are they creating more variety, but they have a part of symbology. The symbolism that we always have in mind, our best-

selling product are these bracelets with two spheres, which also represent polarity. We want people to recognize that they are not buying a bracelet just because it is beautiful, it is a bracelet that has meaning. Trema evolved into an idea of Collective, that is, all people who want to be part of Trema, who have ideas, can do so. We have years of resources, years of this know-how that we want to share. We know the factories, we know the suppliers, we know the artisans, we have a good design team. We want to call them, and that they come to us, and give voice to these people, to show that Trema, once again, is a brand that identifies with all artists who are in accordance with the principles we have.

**What these principles are? Are they still the same, or are they a little different?**

The principles are: simplicity, quality, long lasting, nature, now also collectivity. From bringing together all the artisanal part, all the artisans, artists and creatives. We want to show the world and ourselves that there are people with value, that they do fantastic things and that sometimes they just need a little boost to get where they want to go. We don't want to make a Marketplace. We want to work with these creatives, give them visibility and create symbiotic relationships. That's why, with all the other principles, The Collective was added.

**These creatives would easily be competitors, wouldn't they? What makes them allies?**

Hoje vivemos num mundo estranho, em que há sempre a ideia de concorrência. De que temos é que estar uns contra os outros. Que temos que fazer mais promoções, fazer produtos melhores, dizer que os nossos produtos tem muito mais qualidade que os dos outros. Em termos económicos, o clima de tensão entre as diferentes marcas tem grandes benefícios. Isso tem de sempre existir, quando é uma concorrência saudável, para nós chegarmos aos nossos limites.

We are bringing allies that benefit us and that we can also benefit. Trema will not be based simply on products made by us, they will be products made by us and others. I believe that, many times, by joining synergies, really creating these partnerships, we will be able to

show our customers products that we ourselves had not imagined, but which are what they are looking for. We have a lot of ideas, and we want to create a lot of things, but we're limited to our perspective. By bringing in people with different perspectives, with different backgrounds and knowledge, who can benefit from what we have to give in return, we create this shared value. With collective, our objective is, in a first phase, to give them a voice and a stage, and in a second phase to create things together.

**And would you say that empathy is an important point to manage all these relationships?**

We clearly have to have empathy, we have to realize that we are going to meet very different people, with different ideas, people with different wills and we have to feel really good, because taking these steps, making this effort is difficult. But, if the values are the same, even if sometimes they don't use the same words, even if they have different ideas, if we are following an equal path, we have a very similar philosophy in the end, and that's why the part of empathy is clearly a must. To facilitate the value driven from different perspectives and inputs.

**You mentioned these relationships, now you mention the creation of value. How do you think your marketing actions are now directed towards this?**

Our marketing actions, at this moment, to really show this relationship with our partners here, involves creating a database of stakeholders. And talking to them. The Collective is not only a concept, it is actually a concrete, physical action. In this case, it's a blog where we talk about these people. We go to people, we want to know their artistic process, we talk about people, we talk about what we fell in love with about them, and we show it to our clients. So, in a way, the way we do this, is through our blog The Collective and our database, we make our marketing actions a portal to give voice to this shared value. So the answer is through a portal that we created, where we are always putting in the present in our creations, interviews with the most recent creatives, and in a way, it is a way to give voice to these people. Show our audience what they are, and what they do, and then tell

people, if you want this artist's products, if you think he does interesting things, here's a place where you can make those purchases.

**“People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it” – Do you agree with this quote? If so, what would you say is Trema’s “why”?**

I agree with this quote. Good branding is when the why is clear to all stakeholders. I think what we want to show today and looking at our transformation is: to show creatives is to give voice to artists, and if we really manage to create relationships with the right people, it will make us go further, it will make us give our customers much more useful and desired products. And because of that, being able to really put these different pieces together, it's going to take us a lot further.

## **Annex D: Semi structured Interviews to Trema Projects' External Stakeholders**

**IE1 - 26.09.2021**

**Tell me a little bit about yourself, your background, what do you do.**

I started working as a jeweler at the age of 18, when I decided to open my first studio. Where it stays where it is for 5 years. I made my collections, collaborations with other designers. After closing this atelier five years later, I went to work for an association for a year and a half, it was called the Clube Português de Artes e Ideias, I work with a fixed schedule and a certain salary. Then I decided to open a studio again in which I began exploring other areas that were completely different from other creative areas, such as sculpture, shop windows (I also had to charge Joana Astolfi with her as shop windows for Hermés). For a year I also did as Mercedes shop windows, for 3 years in a row I also did the sets for the Ginásio Clube Português. Then I moved to London for 6 months working for a theatre. I came back because of the pandemic, during which time I was redoing my website and database of my clients here in Portugal.

**When did you first come into contact with Trema? What is the nature of your connection to Trema?**

So I decided to go back to making jewelry, and that's when this idea of working with Trema appeared, a year ago. I had already heard about Trema, but very little either. For me the Trema was the classic bracelet, and my mother even told me about the Trema wallets,

which were of good quality and simple, with a good look. My relationship with the brand is based on developing ideas together. It's still a bit at that stage. I don't know if collaboration is the right word, it just comes down to me and Trema sitting down together and developing something. It's more than a collaboration, because there's input from both parties. It ends up being another partnership or alliance, it's a joint effort.

**Can you recall any of Trema's marketing actions from when you first came into contact with the brand?**

Zero. I knew who the founders were, but I associated the brand with a passion project rather than an established brand.

**Today how would you describe Trema? What would be the first words that come to mind?**

Since the rebranding of the brand, which coincided with my first contact with Trema, I think it started to have a more presence in the market. It already starts to have a language, a differentiating identity. There is layout, a careful image that is presented to the public.

I see Trema's image as something minimalist and that, unlike most accessory brands, it's not trying to sell a lifestyle. It's rare to see people, so I understand that the brand is there to show the product and not to attribute a lifestyle associated with the brand. I remember more earth tones or nature backgrounds. Sustainability is something that I think stands out. I remember this connection with nature. There are some confusing things, like some beaded bracelets that look like they don't match the brand identity.

I am a jeweler, and when I look at an accessories brand I like to see quality and metal product. The bracelets that are developed by Trema, whether in stainless steel or silver, when I look at the marketing of this product, I see quality. Mainly the bracelets, if I go down the street and see someone with a metallic bracelet with two spheres, I associate it with Trema. The other non-metal bracelets could be from any other fast fashion brand, and that confuses me.

**If Trema, as it is in the present, was a person, how would they be like?**

He is a man, the cool kid, with social status. In terms of target I would say with average purchasing power. I don't think it's an expensive product (for the quality it is, in silver). Imagine a person who is having an active social life, wearing a Trema bracelet is a statute, almost. It is not at the level of a Cartier, for example, but thinking about the logistics of Portugal it ends up being associated with a young man with a high social status.

In Trema's advertising, what I like is that the product speaks for itself. It is the consumer who decides if he/she identifies with the brand, and not with the model that would be using the product. It's not that piece that will give it a certain body or a certain social status, it's the piece alone and the client gives it the meaning they want.

You don't have a personified point of comparison, you think "I'm going to buy this product, because I like this product. I'll look like, whatever you want to look like." There it covers a wider range of customers, they resonate with the brand's concept and not with a certain lifestyle that the brand imposes. Anyone who buys Trema, can be someone who only buys because they think it is aesthetically beautiful, can be another target who buys because they want to know about sustainability and handmade, can be someone who buys because they associate advertising with nature, whatever reason: it depends of the consumer.

**Would you say Trema seeks direct contact with you?**

Yes. I would say it's mutual. Trema has several projects so I have several projects, and I have several projects. I feel that our relationship is almost like a relationship of mutual motivation: sometimes I'm more unmotivated and Vicente calls me, other times I'm the one who calls him. It's almost like a relationship from that friend you go to the gym with: we pull together to create something good together.

**Would you say empathy plays an important role in your relationship with Trema?**

Yes. We are both aware of what the other is experiencing and going through, it's more like a relationship and not so much an obligation to meet deadlines. Just today I was talking to him on the phone asking if I could postpone a meeting we had tomorrow because I had an unforeseen event and I know there will be total openness and understanding on the other side for that.

**Do you feel that, when you have a concern or need regarding your connection to Trema (ex: collaboration, The Collective' interview, freelance work, consumer, etc.) you can go to the brand and trust they will receive and address your concern appropriately?**

Yes, that's why I say that this turns out to be a bit more a partnership and not a collaboration. I know there is availability and openness on both sides to create.

**Would you, as a stakeholder, rely on Trema for more than product related business? (Service related or collaboration/partnership related, per example)**

I'm one of those people who doesn't pass on contacts, for example. Because I don't want to be connected to something that might not go well. However, I have exchanged several contacts with Trema because I realized that the way they work and relate to me is how they work and relate to all stakeholders. There is an associated work ethic.

**Can you elaborate on that work ethic?**

Trema is concerned about the producer. It has always been an honest relationship, open to all kinds of input and feedback. In other partnerships I have, as a jeweler, there is a problem with talking about money. With Trema that doesn't happen, we have everything spoken and planned, and there is a constant reiteration and adjustment as we go. It's so clean.

**Would you say you receive updates on the developments of your partnership with Trema?**

Yes. And it was essential because I admit that there is a lot that passes me by. For example regarding the part of the sale. If I don't have to worry about selling, dealing with customers, etc. for me, give me time for the part I really like. For example the creative part, I automatically say "OK let's do it" because then I use my creativity and know that I can contribute a lot more. There is this discussion, there is a constant sharing of what is being done.

## **IE2 – 26.10-2021**

### **Tell me a little bit about yourself, your background, what do you do.**

I'm a videographer. I decided to become a freelancer and eventually I started shooting video clips, people were started to like my work, I created a page and that's it. I actually traced this path here, in fact it's here, until I met Trema. That is how I'm here now, doing this interview.

### **When did you first come into contact with Trema?**

I met someone who worked for Trema when I was recording a video clip, about 8 months ago. When this video clip was released, the owners of the brand liked the result and invited me to join their project. And that's it, after a few phone calls, WhatsApp messages and a trip to Cascais, and we recorded the first video, which was the greenhouse shoot, which was in a greenhouse. That's it, and we started shooting this new image of Trema.

### **Can you tell me a bit more about the nature of your connection to Trema (ex: collaboration, The Collective' interview, freelance work, consumer, etc.)**

I do the video content for Trema. In a freelance hiring contract. Everything that is video, being it that is ads, or social media content (such as REELS, publications) is my job. And actually it's a part that I love, because I've always had this vision, beyond video clips and everything else a person can do at the beginning of their career, too, is do ads again, which is something that is much more interesting, and there's a lot of room for creativity. And I

think Trema allows me that, because in addition to having an image with which I identify a lot, and that matches the image of my own brand. I also feel that I have some power of suggestion, and of being able to shape Trema's videos, so I have openness to be a creative.

**How would you describe Trema? What would be the first words that come to mind?**

Being as impartial as I can, I would say, obviously: nature, light, elegance. These 3 words. Another word that occurs to me is the word minimalism. Minimalism, because, there is a certain kind of simplicity surrounding the visuals of the brand, but which is complex at the same time. It's because it has a meaning behind it, it has a certain weight. But having minimal knowledge about the brand, I can say that it has a rather simple weight.

**What would you say was the benefit someone would have by using a Trema product/service, now?**

Therefore, as a consumer, whenever you have a product or a service, it aims to add value to someone's life. The product itself it is not enough for it to sell. It has to have value. A person who is connected to the Trema brand, or purchases Trema products, or intends to purchase, will be able to see what Trema wants to convey, in terms of image. So, in regards to the words that come to my mind when I think of Trema, I believe the benefit someone has by coming in contact with the brand depends on how they resonate with the brand. For example if they think: "I also like nature, I also like light, I also like elegance." They will find their needs for met through their products. Also, through bracelets, bags, or any other product, if I buy it, I'm buying that brand value. We're buying the name, we're buying that whole image and what it stands for. Basically, when we work for a brand, we sell both the products and the brand above. I think that when a person is going to buy a Trema product, above all they have to want to buy the brand.

**If Trema, as it is in the present, was a person, how would they be like?**

I think it's a woman. At this point I believed I was more of a woman. I liked to say it was unisex, but at least in my eyes right now in my eyes it's a little more female. I think it's

possible to turn it into a pretty unisex brand, but right now. This is because I associate the feminine look a lot, with that scene of, again, elegance. And because the bracelets themselves are fine, they're delicate, I associate a lot with what a woman would wear.

That woman is 28 years. She paints in her spare time, but works at something that gives her enough money to make a solid living. She a high social status, but has creative hobbies. She likes to explore, likes adventure and to travel. A person with a creative touch, who likes to spend a little time in nature and thinks outside the box. I think she is a very complete person, with a higher education and ethical foundations.

**Can you relate to this person?**

Of course. I just described a dream woman.

**Would you say Trema seeks direct contact with you?**

Yes, we are in close contact, it is easy to have a relationship with Trema.

**What do you understand by empathy?**

I think empathy is being able to understand how the other person is feeling, how it is against the individual to see or perceive the world around them.

**Would you say empathy plays an role in your relationship with Trema?**

I think so, but this plays a role in everything that involves creativity and collaboration. My role at Trema is, as above all else, to be a creative. We have to be able to have empathy in the way we relate, because seeing the side of another person understand, their vision and experience, enables us to create a common goal. We are working, so we also have to be very cohesive so that things flow in a certain way. Because, in addition to the creation of value through creativity, we also have a business, we have something we have to push forward and sell, so yes. I have to understand their side, how do they see their own brand

and what is their main goal and they have to see mine, which is, I'm trying to provide a service, but I'm also doing my art. And I think everyone understands that.

**Would you, as a stakeholder, rely on Trema for more than product related business? (Service related or collaboration/partnership related, per example)**

Totally yes, starting today, if I could. I have many clients, but at this moment Trema is one of the clients in which I trust deeply.

**And why do you think you have that trust in Trema that you don't often find in other clients you have? Where do you think this trust comes from?**

That's how, at least in the part of the video, there are customers who have green flags: they are customers we like to be. There are also clients that have red flags, meaning we don't like to have them. Usually the clients we don't like to have, or whatever, are clients I don't normally go back to work with. And clients I work with again are clients I like to have, and I like to work. Because above all, above having a budget, be it bigger or smaller, it doesn't matter, because I always give to my work, the maximum, it has a lot to do with people. If I think that they are really people who make my work easier and make my work better, I think I have a green flag client. What I want from a client, what I want from a brand, which makes me want to work with them, are 2 things: first, that they really have a budget, or be sensitive to me, and then that they make my job easier, that is, don't make the work difficult for me, and actually make it easier, and make it better. That is, if I have good content to do, and if I have to be paid well for content, then I think it's a win win relationship. I don't think there is a better world. And that happens when working with Trema.

**Do you feel that, when you have a concern or need regarding your connection to Trema (ex: collaboration, The Collective' interview, freelance work, consumer, etc.) you can go to the brand and trust they will receive and address your concern appropriately?**

Yes, of course, it's as easy as sending a message on WhatsApp, or calling. I consider myself part of the brand, I can call and exchange ideas. I know that if they really agree, that's fine, but if it's not in the brand's plans, if necessary, I also know that they tell me no. I think it's pretty easy to make suggestions, I think it's pretty easy for me to give my opinions, as a creative.

**Would you say you receive updates on the developments of your connection to Trema?**

This part is easy to do in our relationship, whether it's through in-person meetings, PC meetings, mobile phone calls. Usually if I deliver a job, they let me know straight away if they like it, if they don't, what they want to change, if there is a need to do another budget, for future videos, or things, we are always talking. And, in fact, we managed not only one project, but for example, now, right now, we are managing 3 projects at the same time, and I think I think it's it is thanks to a clear and open communication.

**“People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it” – Do you agree with this quote?**

As I said in the beginning, people buy value. We have to deliver value, so yes, I agree.

**What would you say is Trema’s “why”?**

I know that above all, they want to create a movement, or something of importance. I think therefore. Let's think about why we are talking about a brand, or a business, but I think Trema really wants to create something of great importance. Something that can somehow change people's lives, that can change other brands, or can collaborate with other entities, for example.

I believe that Trema wants to work with other creatives, too, right now, and above all, I think they wake up in the morning more excited about the fact that they will actually have a project allows them to come to work and meet other people, and get to know other people, create meaningful and sustainable objects.

**And do you believe, for example, going back to the question I asked you a little while ago, if you would be willing to collaborate with Trema, in this role that you are now doing as a freelance videographer? Do you think you would, for example, be open to Trema, maybe look for contacts of other artists, or other brands that need a videographer?**

Yes, I think so. Actually, I've already done it. I was going to take a trip, and I actually called one of Trema's founders, asking if he had any contacts for me to go around more easily where I was going (to find work opportunities, for example). By chance this trip didn't end up happening. I know he's a busy person and he had this presence of actually send messages, and try to help. That's why I said I have the trust to speak out if I need something.

We have a project which is Trema Paris. I recently went to record a music video in Paris, and the possibility came up for me to bring Trema's products to Paris, and film. I had even suggested a model for this project, and she had accepted. As I get to Paris, this model doesn't answer the phone, doesn't respond to messages, doesn't say anything, has completely disappeared from social networks, and doesn't respond on WhatsApp, anywhere.

I was desperate, I even went out on the street looking for someone who could model. So I called Vicente, the founder of Trema and explain my situation to him. In a matter of hours, they found a solution and we managed to make the video happen.

Even though I was in Paris, and the Trema team in Portugal, in a matter of hours, they solved a problem I had there, and that was obviously a problem that was for me, it was also part of it, because it was a Trema project. But I really think it's fantastic, having this network of contacts, this willingness and availability to help, nonetheless.

I believe Trema values community, collaboration and people. Collaboration is present all around project. The company is small, but our projects together always involve a number of people: a girl who brings chameleons, we have to have photographers, we have people who pick something from the factory, people everywhere, and people giving input, everyone

with different roles, and everyone adds value and has creative freedom. I think so, I think it's not one person's work, neither 2 nor 3, it's a lot of people's work, and it's really beautiful to see.

**Thank you very much for your availability, I don't know if you have anything else to add to the questions I asked you, anything you want to say**

I think these are very complete questions, thank you, I hope the answers were also complete.

**I really appreciate you once again, your time, and your availability and thank you.**

**IE3 – 27.10.21**

**Tell me a little bit about yourself, your background, what do you do.**

I'm Spanish, I was born in Oviedo, in the north of Spain but I lived all over Europe for all of my life. I'm a fashion and jewelry designer, I studied fashion design in Marangoni in London. I then finished my fashion follow in central san Martins, and I started to work at some firms doing an internship for Jimmy Choo, Ralph Lauren, Diane von Furstenberg, etc. Then I moved to Paris started to work as a sales executive showroom manager for Yves Saint Laurent and that's where I realized I wanted to focus in jewelry. So I went to Milan to do my masters in jewelry design at Marangoni as well, and that's where all the idea for my brand Mass Milano there so that's why it's called Milano, because it came from an idea I had when I was living there. And Mass due to my surname, Masaveu. I founded the brand in 2017 with my sister, and we're here now.

**When did you first come into contact with Trema?**

When I first went to Comporta, I think it was in the summer of 2019, I met Vicente through a friend in common. We had like a huge connection at first because we both work in the

jewelry business, we both believe in a sustainable slow fashion way of making jewelry, we both have so much respect for Mother Nature and everything that surrounds us.

**Can you tell me a bit more about the nature of your connection to Trema (ex: collaboration, The Collective' interview, freelance work, consumer, etc).**

We are partnering in a collection. I've always wanted to do a silver collection because I'm more specialized in precious jewelry, using diamonds and gold. I've always wanted to do a unisex silver collection and I think Trema was the perfect the perfect partner to do this collaboration with because I think they also had the same feeling with me and my brand. So, we understand each other very well and we have the same principles for our brands. Our collection is inspired by Iberia so we want to have something that represents both countries has to do with nature.

**Can I ask you what principles are those?**

My brand's principles are to create jewels that last a lifetime and we refuse to participate in the momentary impact of low quality materials and disposable item. I we have this in common in both brands. We want to take care of what is precious to us, consider objects as extensions of ourselves and be committed to the planet while always seeking for excellence in our creations. We oppose to creating things that are going to last just a few months or days, we create objects and jewels that will last a lifetime.

**Can you recall any of Trema's marketing actions from when you first came into contact with the brand?**

I remember the bracelet the B1 bracelet, which was the first thing that I came across with the brand when I first met Vicente, but I can't remember any marketing actions back then.

In terms of what I felt when I first came into contact with the brand not just the founder, I thought it was really nice because it's such a characteristic bracelet. I think I remember my grandfather used to have a similar one, and at the time it was associated with balance or

something. It reminded me of my Grandad, of traditional jewelry. Meaning something that was well made, that would last you a life-time, so it represents meaning to me.

**What would you say was the benefit someone would have by using a Trema product/service, now?**

Well, first of all that I think it's the handmade and local factor. Just by producing in your own country, you are promoting a sustainable business. Meaning that you avoid all the ethical complications and Co2 emissions from having the impacts of having bought products that were produced in China and were to sent to you. Then, also the quality because handmade items done by master craftsmen assure the product's quality

**If Trema, as it is in the present, was a person, how would they be like?**

A good example is Vicente. I think that we are both ambassadors of our brands. For Trema would be a person of any sex, middle aged to young, independent, is an important person that has a stable job but also that is very aware of the situation with our planet is facing and that wants to take care of it and meaning they wants things to change. I believe it is very for young brands like us to set the example on the young generations that are now going into the accessories business. I think we're teaching them that we have to find a way to keep the world and nature intact and that that begins with stopping mindless overconsumption and creation of goods. Creating beautiful and meaningful objects plays a part in that.

**Would you say Trema seeks direct contact with you?**

Yes, I can remember as soon as you follow Trema on Instagram they send you a direct message to your Instagram.

**Would you, as a stakeholder, rely on Trema for more than product related business? (Service related or collaboration/partnership related, per example)**

Yes because I've been friends with the founder before we were partners. In my way of running my business I always seek the opinion of my friends, even more if they work the

business. It's good to know good to know what their what they're thinking and how we can help each other.

**Would you say you receive updates on the developments of your connection to Trema?**

**Ex: Does Trema consult you on advances and performances, such as environmental, social and economic performances of the project?**

We have weekly calls, where we update each other on everything that is going on and what we have to do for the following weeks. We also share a drive where we share every document created and discussed, and then we stay we stay in touch to know all the decisions and the emails that are happening with the productions. So yes, I am very much kept updated.

**Do you feel that, when you have a concern or need regarding your connection to Trema (ex: collaboration, The Collective' interview, freelance work, consumer, etc.) you can go to the brand and trust they will receive and address your concern appropriately?**

Yes, so we have a group chat in WhatsApp and that's where we address everything that we have to discuss for the following week. What's happening, what do we need to do, what we are missing, etc. I always feel heard, and that when I say something in the group chat they will pay attention and help me resolve my problem. They are very nice people.

**“People don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it” – Do you agree with this quote?**

I mean yes because what motivates people to buy, is the mission and vision of what you are doing. That is how you achieve your business.

What would you say is Trema's “why”?

So, Trema is not just about selling bracelets and leather accessories. It is way of life in the why that connects its clients with nature and with new artists. From my experience with the brand, throughout this collaboration we've made contact with silversmiths from Porto, for

example. In which they put me in direct contact with them and they put them in contact with me. So it's also like they end up creating a circle of connections that benefits the interested parties. Just like a circle of abundance, and good energy.

#### **IE4 – 29.10.21**

##### **Tell me a little bit about yourself, your background, what do you do.**

I live in Lisbon now, since two and half years so I arrived in early 2019. I moved from London and I've been practicing my fine arts practice since 10 years, I believe. I work with installation but also with sculptures, film, I collaborate with performers and musicians in my work. It's quite a broad practice in terms of medium and the production of works but they are all linked together by type thread of the research and the concepts which looks at our relationship with architecture. And at influence that architecture has a nice as individuals, as inhabitants, as societies, and also the influence that we have an architecture. So also the-co-influence of the two and landscape is also broadly considered within this relationship.

##### **When did you first come into contact with Trema?**

Probably, if I'm honest, online. I'm not hugely technologically advanced, but Instagram I do use and it would have been online. Portugal, or better Lisbon is quite a small city and a lot of my friends, were following Trema. So things started to pop up in my feed and the algorithm emphasizes it for you so I'm pretty sure that was my first discovery of Trema.

##### **Can you recall any of Trema's marketing actions from when you first came into contact with the brand?**

It was definitely leather goods. That I remember. This was all pre pandemic, by the way. So, 2019. I remember the goods I thought were very physically or aesthetically appealing. I think it was wallets... well they were definitely leather things. In terms of the visuals I also really like it was photography. It was always very clean, so there was this imagery often not

overbearing. This was all before I met Vicente, who is the founder and artistic director behind all of it. Then I met the person behind the brand and that gives you a completely different perspective because you also have all the narrative that comes through some of those like the imagery. I think from the marketing one could understand what the brand is trying to do, the way it sources materials, and all the sustainability which of course comes through the image. But when of it when you get that information first hand from a real life person it makes a bigger impression on you.

**What would be the first words that come to mind when you think of Trema?**

The sustainability aspect of it, the sourcing local, and that heavy focus on the sourcing of materials. I think they are very rigorous on where the materials come from, and how they manufactured and also about the way that the staff and everyone related to the brand is treated. So, I guess the ethos of the company is the first thing that I associate with Trema. I would say fine and simple things. And I like fine and simple because most things in the world are too fussy or over decorated, and I like things that are done fine and simply. For me, if things are well made there is this sense of security. I just don't like things that are badly made, I think also because I work with making myself it's just it really irritates me. I like simple because you can wear it every day, and take it with you. You can tailor it with things. Simple it speaks to me, I'm not a huge fan of overcomplicating.

**What would you say was the benefit someone would have by using a Trema product/service, now?**

Definitely functional, especially in regards to the leather goods. But also emotional, for example I recently lost present that was a very cute tiny functional purse and I'm heartbroken. You get attached to these things, they become part of your life. They become an extension of yourself that I really believe in and that also comes into choosing the products that you buy well. The other thing is the aesthetic of it.

**Can you tell me a bit more about the nature of your connection to Trema (ex: collaboration, The Collective' interview, freelance work, consumer, etc.)**

Now I have one of the bracelets, so that is something I wear almost daily. That is important for me, most things that I buy here and there have to have a personal meaning or have to be gifts from friends and family. I like things that have history, with which you can make sort of an emotional bond with it. Of course knowing the owner of the brand really helps, because then you also know the people behind the work. I also really believe in and it's nice to wear these things and to put them out there because then you can tell others about what you support and believe in, being it the concept behind a brand.

Also, my relationship with the brand is also based on The Collective. So the art director came to my studio and we did an interview a good few months ago, which was actually really firstly a lovely exercise, and secondly for me its input. I'm a big believer in cross disciplinary so I like that approach. I believe it's important work, to reach out across disciplines. Designing products can be a bit insular, fashion can be insular, Fine Arts for sure it can be very insular. So it's important to make bridges between these disciplines and also richer broader audience and learn from each other. So, I really like the initiative of The Collective. It is a way that the people who follow Trema can learn about artists, and creatives, it is the way that artists and the brand could potentially co-influence each other or collaborate.

**If Trema, before when you first met the brand and as it is in the present, was a person, how would they be like?**

I don't know because I don't know enough of before. But for now, I'd say it has much more of an androgynous look. For me it's not gendered, for now.

**Would you say Trema seeked direct contact with you?**

For the interview, yes. I think that, with anyone creative for me (so artists, designers, curators, art historians, etc) We end up meeting so many people every day, and the process

of connecting in this area is very natural. You're either attracted by the personality or by their work, sense of humor, or viewpoints on life. It's like meeting friends. And then from that, things develop that you have a good conversation, you find similar shared interests due to potentially compatible research or aesthetics, or having traveled to a particular place... Then, from there things continue. I think that with Trema, we shared certain views on life and we have a similar mindset about certain things. So, the art director and I met socially, then we became friends, then he came, I think at some point, he came to an exhibition. And from there grew a conversation and a mutual interest. Because a brand is also inspired by the world, so a brand chooses the things that inspire it and I guess that was the connection.

**Would you say you received updates on the developments of your connection to Trema, namely the interview and photographs?**

Definitely. I mean everything was painstakingly transcribed. I remember thinking that more work went into it than I would have ever expected it to. I do remember that cutting that interview I think at least three times, and then realize that I had permission to cut more it and I was very happy.

**Do you feel that, when you have a concern or need regarding your connection to Trema (ex: collaboration, The Collective' interview, freelance work, consumer, etc.) you can go to the brand and trust they will receive and address your concern appropriately?**

Yeah, for sure. I mean it wasn't necessary, but I even if I had any extra thoughts or suggestions I pretty certain the brand would be super open to all of it.

**“People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it” – Do you agree with this quote?**

Yes, I do completely. It shows in life so many times, and that's why I also (going back onto the concept of knowing someone behind a brand first) It really makes a difference. As an

artist, I know that for many collectors they want to get to know the artist. That makes a difference, you want to know the person behind it, you want to know the drive.

**What would you say is Trema's "why"?**

I can say multiple. I mean I really think, of course, is this sustainability and this giving back to Portugal using Portuguese suppliers. There's this rootedness in Portugal. I find it admirable. The second one is of course the symbology, in the but it feeds in with this sustainability is the way it's a particular way of leading life and thinking and taking things slower. In anthropology and ancient believes, symbology is associated with knowledge and meaning, it was the things that they listed it too and things that we were trained out of by contemporary western consumerist culture. So, it's really going back to this way of life, for me is the link with slowness. This connects with the sense of the creation of a community. You can't be on your own, you are part of a community. So I think it's that surrounding yourself with people in the sense of creating a healthy community and over people like minded people, who can think a bit outside the box.

**IE5 – 29.10.21**

**Tell me a little bit about yourself, your background, what do you do.**

I am a designer and plastic artist. I created a brand that is Tosco, in which I work with cement and develop from decorative pieces to sculptures. I have several roles in my brand, but if I could choose I would only be doing the creative part.

**When did you first come into contact with Trema?**

So I work as an artist, and I think for us to grow as an artist I feel that collaboration is essential in this area. With people I admire, whose work I follow and who follow mine, I like to talk to them and exchange ideas, suggestions, etc. In my studio, I share the space with other people, with other artists who work with other materials and there is also a lot of exchange of ideas. I think this synergy is a part that, without a doubt, that even not looking for ends up happening. And that's when Trema appeared! Vicente saw my work on

Instagram, and wanted to come visit the studio one day to get to know me and to better understand what I was doing.

In fact, I had already seen Trema before I even met Vicente. I think maybe it was around the time Trema was released. Yes, I already knew Trema from that time. I think it was a few years ago already. Then, I have the idea that the brand was a little forgotten, maybe it was the least active in the market... I don't know, I know I stopped having that contact with the brand and then I came back in contact when at the time I met Vicente in 2019.

**Can you tell me a bit more about the nature of your connection to Trema (ex: collaboration, The Collective' interview, freelance work, consumer, etc.)**

My relationship with Trema started with The Collective journal. So the art director came to my studio, and told me that he had this platform where he wanted to promote artists and their creations. He asked me if I would be interested in participating and I said of course I would, and there they came to the studio to interview me.

**Can you recall any of Trema's marketing actions from when you first came into contact with the brand?**

No. I believe that when the brand was born, it was before the boom of young portuguese creative brands. In recent years, there has now been a large growth of young people creating brands, for example in the area of clothing (bikini brands, etc). The only idea I have is that Trema from before is that it pioneered this. I don't even know what year the brand started, but I know that at that time there wasn't much going on like that.

**Now, how would you describe Trema? What would be the first words that come to mind?**

For me, there are two components here: There is Trema as a product brand, and there is Trema as a collaboration service. As a brand, Tema has very sellable products. Trema's image as a product brand is based on minimalism and quality. Then, as an artist, I find this

new service of the brand as A Collective, very interesting. To spread the work of other artists, to enable a possible collaboration between the brand and ourselves and even between the creatives themselves. I think these collaborations open doors that otherwise wouldn't be as easily opened. The brand is creating a network of people who, otherwise, might not collaborate or even know each other or know about the existence of others. I think this initiative is a win-win: Trema makes artists known through its own platform, and makes itself known through those artists.

**Would you, as a stakeholder, trust Trema for more than product related business? (Service related or collaboration/partnership related, per example)**

Yes. Trema and I never did business, so to speak. What took place was a collaboration in the form of Collective, they came to my study to interview me and photograph me; and we also collaborated when I lended some pieces of mine, from Tosco, for a Trema shoot last summer. So yes, I totally trust Trema for a future partnership, as I have trusted in these collaborations.

**Do you feel that, when you have a concern or need regarding your connection to Trema (ex: collaboration, The Collective' interview, freelance work, consumer, etc.) you can go to the brand and trust they will receive and address your concern appropriately?**

Yes, without a doubt. So far, in all the interactions I've had with Trema, I've realized that they are always very accessible and open people. There is therefore an opening for questions or exchanges of ideas. So yes.

**“People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it” – Do you agree with this quote?**

I think so. I think that more and more people are more interested in the way things are done, how they are produced and the ideas behind the projects, than often just in the piece itself. Because in terms of product, there will always be big brands and big stores selling that kind

of product. What makes the difference is that the consumer starting to have a different awareness about the products and about the brands. I think that the story behind it, how things started, how things are made and the brand's values make the difference, makes someone buy from this brand and not another. I speak from my perspective, as a person who produces and owns small brand, because I am the producer of my brand. I notice that people are looking for something with meaning.

**If so, what would you say is Trema's "why"?**

The concern with reusing materials, and giving new life to materials. This Trema up-cycling concept, making redundant materials in premium products is key. It's about taking something that apparently has no value, it's garbage, and turning it into something that has a lot of value. This is an aspect that I think is very important, and more and more nowadays because industries have tons of waste and therefore I think this is a very pertinent question. It's actually a point we have in common. In my work, I transform cement into art. And then this creation of human value, by connecting different people through their values and empathy.

**What would you say was the benefit someone would have by using a Trema product/service, now?**

First of all, the benefit of quality. Trema's products are produced and designed with care. They are better products, more expensive but they are products that will last a lifetime. The minimalism of the design contributes to timelessness, to not only last a lifetime but to want to use. It's not a product from a trend, it's something with meaning and with a concrete objective.

This meaning also comes from the fact that it is produced locally and by hand, rather than being made in China, in an unethical way. There's the up-cycling component, which we've already talked about... I think these are all issues that make the difference in consumer choice. In terms of an artist's benefit of collaborating with Trema, it's on a broad platform. Also the network, around Trema. It's a site that virtually brings together various creatives

from different areas, with different experiences but with the intention of allying themselves and I think this is undoubtedly a benefit.