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Introduction

The market today is becoming more and more saturated with products with similar features and quality. This means that companies need to differentiate themselves in other ways. This is often done through branding. Branding can be described as the creation of a story, a set of values, and an identity that surrounds the product.

When talking about brands, emphasize is often on logo, name, packaging, advertisements and so on. There are few references to the product itself. But, as Karjalainen (2004) puts it, *the product is often the strongest manifestation of brand identity*. It is therefore important to build up a strategic product language, based on brand identity, to be able to transmit a consistent and holistic message to the customers. This will most likely be one of the most important factors of success in the future.

The purpose of this document is to shortly present the work I am doing in the course Design Project 9 which aims at giving an in depth knowledge about a chosen part of design theory and research. Through a literature study which results in an academic paper, and a following project, this theory will be applied and further developed. I have chosen the direction of strategic design, and this document will describe the topic and objectives for the paper and project.

Key words: identity, brand, value, product language, strategic communication, design format, semantic transformation, differentiation

Goal

The objective for the article and project is to learn about recent research concerning how product design can be used as a strategic tool to communicate brand identity and values. The main topic of my study is:

How can a strategic design language be developed and deployed to obtain differentiation in the market?

Focus of Paper

- Strategic communication of identity and values through product design.

The article will deal with the issue of using design as a strategic tool to communicate brand identity and values through products. Important questions that will be addressed are:

- What methodology exists for developing product references and a product language?
- How can a company develop a product language to support its strategy?
- How can a distinct product language be deployed systematically to obtain product differentiation and a consistent brand identity?

Emphasize will be on studying relevant issues related to this theme and research done to develop a product language for a brand that communicates a predefined message. Important authors that will be referred to and discussed are: Toni-Matti Karjalainen and Anders Warel.

Project Objectives

In the project part I would like to add one extra dimension to the aspect of using product design references as a tool for strategic communication of brand identity and values. I will study the *dynamics* of the product language – how is it adapted and developed through time? A product language can seldom be static. Different values might be expressed and interpreted differently according to time and context. How can a company keep up in the competitive market and at the same time maintain their brand identity? How is the relation and balance between continuity and novelty in strategic product development?

I will analyze the product language related to a brand identity based upon the product portfolio, using the theory suggested by Toni-Matti Karjalainen and Anders Warell. I would like to perform interviews with the designers about how they handle the issue of communicating brand values and identity through product references, and at the same time be innovative and stay competitive. If there is time I would, on the basis of the information I find, try to make some strategic guidelines and some concept sketches. Jordan toothbrushes will be used as a case study if possible.

The format of the delivery might be an illustrative report, posters or an exhibition, depending on how the project develops and what turns out to be the most representative format.

Goals for the Basics Thesis seminar in Helsinki

The paper in this course has a deadline the 1st of November. This means that it has to be nearly finished at the time of the seminar. Because of this it would be interesting to discuss the topic of my paper with focus on the dynamics of a product language, which is the main topic for the following project. It would be really interesting to look into the balance between continuity, in order to express brand identity, and the innovation and novelty of new products.

Main literature:

Karjalainen, T. M. (2004) *Semantic transformation in design*, Uiah, Helsinki, Finland.

Warrell, A. (2001). *Design Syntactics: A Functional Approach to Visual Product Form*, Chalmers, Göteborg, Sweden