Exploring the Process of Developing a Visual Brand Language Focusing on Product Design

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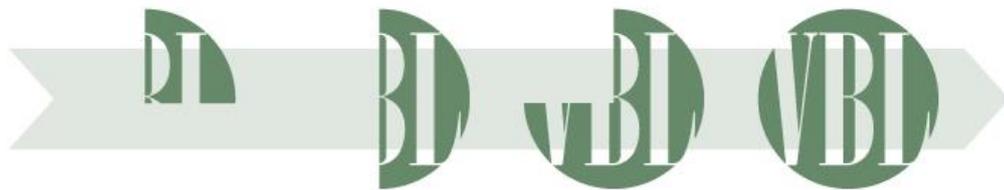
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SAMMANFATTNING

Denna uppsats undersöker hur processen ser ut för att ta fram ett varumärkesspecifikt formspråk. Ett behov av en strukturerad process kan urskiljas, och genom att förstå hur ett varumärkesspecifikt formspråk kan tas fram, finns möjligheten till en ökad vinst för företag samt att förstärka deras kundrelationer. Ett varumärkesspecifikt formspråk kan bidra till en närmare relation mellan företaget, dess produkter eller tjänster, och dess slutkunder, vilket ger en möjlighet att kommunicera externt och skapa en starkare position i kundernas medvetande. Studien fokuserar främst på ett specifikt företag, ROL Ergo, som är en av marknadens största leverantörer av höj- och sänkbara bordsstativ. Företaget har ännu inte utvecklat ett eget formspråk, men med sin tillväxt följer behovet av en enhetlig produktportfolio, det vill säga ett varumärkesspecifikt formspråk. Två frågeställningar har tagits fram och valts att bygga denna rapport runt. Dessa undersöker hur processen ser ut för att ta fram ett varumärkesspecifikt formspråk (med fokus på produktdesign) och vad det finns för möjligheter att ta fram ett varumärkesspecifikt formspråk och samtidigt uppfylla kundspecifika krav. Således är målet för examensarbetet att, bortsett från att besvara frågeställningarna, genomföra processen och därmed skapa ett varumärkesspecifikt formspråk för ROL Ergo och på så sätt adressera problemet med den bristande ingenkänningen av ROL Ergo som varumärke av deras slutkunder. För att uppnå dessa mål krävdes information både från ROL Ergo samt företag och personer med kunskap om processen. Denna information erhölls genom intervjuer med nyckelpersoner. För att gå in mer på djupet, samlades ytterligare information in genom litteraturstudier med grund i produktdesign i de teoretiska områdena produktutveckling, industriell design och marknadsföring. Resultatet pekar på en möjlighet att utveckla en standardiserad process för att ta fram ett varumärkesspecifikt formspråk. Baserat på litteraturstudierna samt datainsamlingen tycks processen bestå av tre steg, vilka är; definiera varumärket, definiera produkten och definiera formen. Efter validering av den föreslagna processen kan denna användas som grund för fortsatt forskning om framtagning av ett varumärkesspecifikt formspråk. Det kan finnas en möjlighet att utveckla processen på en mer detaljerad nivå och i användning av specifika metoder. Tillämpligheten av processen i olika företag bör även valideras. Processen ses som allmängiltig, med andra ord inte begränsad till specifika företag eller produkter. Trots att de intervjuade personerna var verksamma inom business-to-consumer området så tros processen vara tillämpbar även för företag inom business-to-business området, men behovet av detta kan undersökas ytterligare. Bristen på information som kunde hittas om processer för att ta fram varumärkesspecifika formspråk samt resultaten från intervjuerna indikerar novation av resultatet angående processen i denna rapport.

Nyckelord: Varumärkesspecifikt formspråk, formspråk, processutveckling, produktdesign, branding

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the process of developing a visual brand language. With the need for a structured process and the opportunity to both increase profit as well as creating a company-customer relation, understanding how a visual brand language is implemented becomes crucial. The visual brand language allows for a closer relation between the company, its products or services, and the end customer, enabling a firm to communicate and be recognized externally. This study focuses namely on one company, ROL Ergo, which is one of the world's largest suppliers of custom-made ergonomic table stands. The company has not yet developed a visual brand language, but with its growth, there is an ascending need for consistency in the product portfolio, i.e. a visual brand language, with which the company can communicate in the market. Two research questions have emerged and are addressed throughout this thesis. These explore what the process of developing a visual brand language is (focusing on product design) and how to create a visual brand language and at the same time meet customer specific requirements.

Thus, the objectives for the master thesis work are, apart from answering the research questions regarding the process of developing a visual brand language, to implement the process and hence, create a visual brand language for ROL Ergo and by doing so address their issue of not attaining the desired recognition by their end customers. To meet the objectives information was required both from ROL Ergo and companies with knowledge about the process. This information has been obtained by interviewing key people within the organizations. Additional data was obtained through literature studies to elaborate more in depth. The literature used had foundation in design drawn from theoretical fields of product development, industrial design and marketing. The result indicates that there are possibilities to acquire a standardized process that could be used to develop a visual brand language. Based on literature review and data collection the process consists of three major steps, which are; defining the brand, defining the product and defining the shape. Upon validation, this process serves as a basis for further research on the process of creating a visual brand language. There might be an opportunity in developing the process into a more detailed process with more specified methods to use. The process should also be validated further in terms of applicability for different companies. The process could be generally applicable, in other words not restricted to certain companies or products. Even though the interviewees were all in the business-to-consumer area, the process might be applicable even for suppliers or business-to-business companies but the need for it can be investigated further.

Keywords: Visual brand language, process development, product design, design language, branding

FOREWORD

Following are a few words for acknowledging help and inspiration for my thesis. Without these people this work would not have been the same and I appreciate everyone's support and commitment.

The work presented in this Master Thesis was conducted as a part of the Industrial Design Engineering Master's programme at the division of Machine Design, department of Mechanical Engineering, at The Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm 2016.

With the desire of being an asset for the company, at which the work would be conducted, as well as fulfilling all aspects of a Master Thesis, companies were contacted with hopes that I would be offered that one perfect task. Getting in contact with ROL Ergo I soon realized their endeavor and zeal to find a task that would suit both me and the company. Discussing the needs, requirements and interests it was decided on the process of creating a visual brand language with focus on the product design.

There are many people that have helped me during the course of this work. I especially want to thank my commissioner and mentor at ROL Ergo, Anders Flygare, for being responsive, supportive and always making sure I had everything I needed. My supportive team at ROL Ergo as well as other coworkers for making me feel welcome and appreciated. My supervisor at the Royal Institute of Technology, Liridona Sopjani, for valuable insights and taking her time to help me reach my goal, and finally my friends and family for all the support and encouragement they have given me.

Rebecka Chiu

Jönköping, June 2016

GLOSSARY

Below are listed some definitions and terms as well as abbreviations that are used in this Master thesis.

Visual brand language	The set of design elements such as form, materials, color, composition and finish used to communicate a company's brand values and personality. (Visual brand language = VBL)
Form	Shape (geometry), surface texture and dimension.
Design language	A set of design elements such as form, materials, color, composition and finish.
Function	What a product does, actively or passively, in order to add to a purpose for the user.
VBL guideline document	A design document that specifies the brand values and the primary guidelines that address the overall spirit of the product (Design Langugae - an essential part of market & business strategy, 2016).
User	The individual interacting with the product.
Product	An object, service or system manufactured or refined to satisfy customer needs.
Design (process)	A set of activities that generate and develop a product from need, product idea or technology (Blessing & Chakrabarti, 2009).
Design (object)	The result of a design process.
Core values	The basis upon which the members of a company make decisions, plan strategies, and interact with each other and their stakeholders (Essex, 2016).
Brand values	See Core values.
Brand identity	The identity of a company that serves to provide direction, purpose and meaning for that company (Aaker D. A., 2010).
Brand awareness	The strength of a brand's presence in the costumers minds (Aaker D. A., 2010).
Brand equity	The value of a brand beyond its physical assets (Kokemuller, 2016).
Ingredient brand	A created brand of a component or an ingredient used in a product to add value to that product (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2010).
Business-to-consumer	A marketing strategy involving transactions of products or services between a company and the consumer market. (Business-to-consumer = B2C)
Business-to-business	A marketing strategy involving transactions of products or services between companies. (Business-to-business = B2B)

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1 INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the process of developing a visual brand language. With the need for a structured process and the opportunity to both increase profit as well as creating a company-customer relation, understanding how a visual brand language is implemented becomes crucial. The visual brand language allows for a closer relation between the company, its products or services, and the end customer, enabling a firm to communicate and be recognized externally. This study focuses namely on one company, ROL Ergo, which is one of the largest suppliers of ergonomic table stands. The company has not yet developed a visual brand language, but with its growth, there is an ascending need for consistency in the product portfolio, i.e. a visual brand language, with which the company can communicate in the market. In this chapter the background, purpose, delimitations and methods used in the project are presented as well as the incentives for research work.

1.1 Background

Founded in 1985, ROL Ergo is today the world's top supplier of custom-made electric sit-stand table stands. The company owns the whole chain, developing their own control systems, including software, and furniture design. ROL Ergo also manufactures everything in its own factories. This complete commitment is unique in the industry (ABOUT ROL ERGO, 2016).

Being a supplier, ROL Ergo has to meet customer requirements both general and specific. This means that they rarely get to put their logotype on their products. Hence, communicating with the end customer via brand name is getting lost; an issue which concerns the company itself in terms of gaining customers and further recognition in the market. Though, the brand can be recognized with more than just the logotype. Taking Apple or Audi as an example, the products would still be recognizable as the certain brand simply by looking at design principles and signature elements that characterize these brands. The aim for ROL Ergo is that by looking at their products, they will be recognized as a ROL Ergo product without the logotype being necessarily visible. There is an opportunity to strengthen the brand by creating a clear visual brand language. Not having the possibility to add their own logotype on the products, due to specific customer requirements (ROL Ergo as supplier), but with a strong desire to be known as a brand, ROL Ergo's goal is to be recognized through its products simply by design principles and signature elements.

Creating a consistency within the entire product portfolio helps identifying the brand. To facilitate the process of designing new coherent products, a guideline document can be used –namely a visual brand language. This visual brand language guideline document is a document with set of branding guidelines and rules for a brand to maintain their identity (Cousins, 2016). However, doing so is challenging not only for ROL Ergo, but as well for other firms as references to how such process can be done and how these goals are to be met are limited in the design literature. Many firms today follow the suggestions that their design team intuitively creates for them, therefore, there is no standardized way of dealing with such matter within an organization. In such regard, exploring this process becomes important for firms who are found in similar situation as ROL Ergo.

This gives an uprising to the questions of how we can identify an existing design language and transform this into a visual brand language guideline document, what the process is of developing a visual brand language and what the possibilities are to create a visual brand language as a supplier when both general and specific customer requirements have to be met.

1.2 Purpose and objectives

The thesis explores how a visual brand language is developed and what methods are used in the process of doing so. The study involves an analysis of other brands' visual brand language and approach using interviews, observations, and documentation. From the data collected and literature review where applicable, the process was investigated in order to find out if patterns of processes exist such as standardized ways of developing such brand language. Using this process analysis and investigations made inside the company ROL Ergo in this paper, a development of a visual brand language will be initiated. The current assortment of products will also be analyzed to identify current design language inside the company being studied. Thus, the objectives for the master thesis work are, apart from answering the research questions regarding the process of developing a visual brand language, to implement the process and hence, create a visual brand language for ROL Ergo and by doing so addressing their issue of not attaining the desired recognition by their end customers.

1.3 Research questions

The following questions have emerged and are addressed throughout this thesis:

1. What is the process of developing a visual brand language (focusing on product design)?
2. What are the possibilities of creating a visual brand language and at the same time meet customer specific requirements?

Research question number two will be more of an extended part of the main question, number one, and therefore mentioned mainly in the discussion chapter.

1.4 Incentives for the research work

Current literature, in the design field, is limited in terms of addressing the need for guidelines on how companies can develop visual brand language accordingly with regards to their products. Interviewing practicing designers and professors in design and product development, no standardized process of developing a visual brand language could be identified. Though, there was a pattern in how design practitioners proceed to develop a visual brand language and therefore there seemed to be an opportunity to develop a more standardized process of developing a visual brand language.

1.4.1 The opportunity to increase profit by increasing brand awareness through product design

The market as it is today, cluttered with a huge amount of products, differentiating products within the market is most essential for generating sales. Few studies suggests that design improves a company's image, its coherence, and its differentiation from competitors. Mozota (2003) defines competitive strategy as being different by deliberately choosing a different set of activities to deliver a unique mix of value. (Mozota, 2003) The brand is increasingly becoming the key source for differentiation influencing customer purchase choice (Srivastava, 2011), hence emphasizing the importance of brand awareness. Brand associations are divided in three parts: attitudes, benefits and attributes, verifying the relation between brand awareness and the descriptive features of a product (Mozota, 2003).

A brand that is frequently mentioned in terms of brand awareness and visual brand language is Apple. Apple went from being a financially troubled company in 1997 to being the most valuable computer maker in the world just ten years later. One of the highly regarded reasons of the success

was the design-driven culture built to connect with their customers in a deeply emotional way (Brunner & Emery, 2009).

Previous research indicates a positive relationship between brand awareness and market outcome (Huang & Sarigöllü, 2011) as well as industrial design and company performance (Gemser & Leenders, 2001).

1.4.2 The opportunity to create a company-customer relation by communicating brand values through product design

A great product or a good business is not always the result of a nicely designed object. The difference between a good design and a great product is that a great product embodies an idea that people can emotionally engage with by understanding it and learning about it. The product is not complete if there is no strong idea that pervades the design of the product and the way people identify with the brand. A design embodying a strong idea establishes a relationship between the company and its customers. (Brunner & Emery, 2009) The design should incorporate all positive things that the customer experiences about the brand. This is both the brand essence and the value proposition which is divided in four parts: brand as a product, brand as a company, brand as a person and brand as a symbol, all contributing to the customer relationship. (Mozota, 2003) As a part of 'brand as a product' are product attributes, hence a part of creating a customer relationship is through product design.

1.4.3 The need for a structured process for designing new products within a common product portfolio

Every company uses some sort of strategy within their organization which facilitates processes. Design being an element increasingly incorporated in organizations, raises also the need for a structured process of integrating such features. Improving the effectiveness and efficiency of design practice and management is also greatly motivated by the importance of design. (Blessing & Chakrabarti, 2009)

A well-defined visual brand language optimizes the product line strategies, reduces manufacturing costs, shortens product development schedules and enables companies to bring their product to market faster (Mumgaard, 2016). A visual brand language creates consolidation in the product development leading to consistent decision making, shorter product development cycles and development cost savings. Literature indicate that short lead times can be used to gain competitive advantages, thus connecting the incentive of increasing profit with the need for a structured process. Externally a visual brand language increases brand loyalty and more creditability with customers by aligning the products with the brand's core values. Implementing a visual brand language will thus lead to increased productivity and increased brand value. (1, 2016) As for all profit making companies, profit is key. Exploring some of the most successful companies indicates that there is a relationship between a successful company and a clear visual brand language.

1.5 Delimitations

This thesis project contains a study of a process from which a visual brand language through product design will be obtained, though limitations exist and are briefly mentioned. The process of developing a visual brand language is described together with parts of the suggested visual brand language to be used for future ROL Ergo products. In regard to the company's confidentiality, parts of the results from the implementation will be left out.

The study is similar to a comparative study comparing companies, found in literature, that have a visual brand language with a company that does not. However, companies being within different business areas, cannot be directly compared to each other which required conclusions to be made

based on some similarities and discussions with stakeholders and people with knowledge from experience and practice. This is a result of focus being on finding information based on the designers' perspective instead of a specific business area. In addition, creating a visual brand language is creating an image for a company. Being such an essential part of the brand strategy, the part created will only be a proposition. In this paper, visual brand language will be used to refer to the product design aspect of the company brand image. A mood board envisioning the visual brand language is developed using words chosen to represent the future product portfolio. For legal reasons this mood board will not be presented in this thesis. The paper will also show a product with implemented visual brand language. With respect to the focus of this master thesis work, this example is strictly design oriented and manufacturing aspects are not considered.

1.6 Methodology

This thesis strives to present and explore scientific knowledge about design, in regard of the process of design and design methodology. This was conducted with an approach which stems from design research where literature is presented and integrated into the final outcome of the paper. Blessing and Chakrabarti (2009) claim that there are no shared view on the aims, objectives and methodology for design research, though the overall aim is to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of design in order to develop more successful products in the end (Blessing & Chakrabarti, 2009). To answer the stated questions information was required both from ROL Ergo and companies with knowledge about the process. This information has been obtained by interviewing key people within the organizations. Meetings were being held to assure that the work was following its intended line, that the result matched the expectations and to keep the stakeholders updated and involved. Additional information was found in literature and articles as well as websites. The literature used had foundation in design drawn from the theoretical fields of product development, industrial design and marketing.

1.6.1 Data collection

The data used for this study was obtained through face-to-face interviews and interviews via telephone and Skype. The participants were from different companies in both Sweden and USA. Among these a Director of business development/ Senior Designer from an industrial design consulting firm specializing in product development and a Creative director and Designer from a design, research and photographic documentary studio. Additionally, discussions were held with professors from Universities located in Sweden, USA and Finland, all of the professors with some expertise in design. All interviews were conducted by the author, with a single interviewee, between January 2016 and April 2016.

Through the interviews, the focus was on collecting information about the visual brand language and the process of creating one emphasizing the role of product design. The interviews were semi structured with the intention to understand more about the process of developing a visual brand language with focus on the products.

The different answers to the main question lead to supplementary questions specific for those answers and each interview took approximately 50 minutes. The semi structured interviews were used to gather qualitative information. Therefore, one main open-ended question was used, see Appendix A, in order to collect information based in knowledge and experience. All interviewees were practicing designers, thus usually busy, therefore not having more than one chance to interview them, as such semi structured interviews was the preferable method to use (Bernard, 2006). Notes were taken during the interviews and complied directly afterwards when the information was most accessible in mind. In order to encourage the interviewees to speak as freely as possible the interviews were not recorded.

Qualitative data was also obtained as structured text in the shape of actual visual brand languages developed by two of the interviewees for their clients. In respect to both the companies and their clients, no details from these are presented in this thesis, but essential information regarding the methods are summarized in the same section as the results from the interviews. Analyzing the qualitative data from the interviews as well as the structured text, the focus of the analysis was to identify consistencies in how people proceed in developing a visual brand language.

In addition, a short survey was sent out at ROL Ergo to identify what 'words' would represent the company and their products according to the employees and also how well they were aware of the colors connected to ROL Ergo. The questions were sent out via email generating a response rate of 71,7 %. The same questions were asked both to the decision-making and marketing oriented employees, with the future plans and visions for ROL Ergo, and customers to identify current and intended position. The results were then analyzed to find common words or a path to follow. Striving to generate a high response rate, there were only three short questions included in the survey. Asking employees to describe the company using three words might result in experimental artifacts as a result of them answering with their own email addresses, i.e. non anonymous. To try to eliminate these factors the identities were said to be kept confidential.

Finally, additional data was obtained through literature studies to elaborate more in depth.

Since defining the process of creating a visual brand language is a part of the result, the method of developing a visual brand language will be found in the chapter named "Analysis". With the intention to initiate a visual brand language at ROL Ergo, personal observations were used as well as discussions, with people at the company, during the implementation phase.

2 FRAME OF REFERENCE

In this chapter, the theoretical reference frame can be found. Finding a gap in the research regarding a standardized process of developing a visual brand language, the area was investigated further collecting information about marketing, branding and design in connection to product development. The chapter presents some of the existing knowledge and former performed research found in the area of interest.

2.1 The concept of visual brand language

A visual brand language is a set of design elements such as form, materials, color, composition and finish used to communicate a company's brand values and personality. As a part of a brand's DNA, visual brand language aims to create a visual consistency within the product families reflecting the promise of the brand known as core brand values (Confidential, 2010). The core brand values should be seen as timeless truths, "What do the brand stand for?", with the same relevancy today as in the future. The goal is to generate advantageous impressions prior to the product's purchase and use by making the visual design of the product meaningful in a positive way to customers.

A successful visual brand language is recognized by its uniqueness –what differentiates the product within the market, relevancy –by being relevant to the context of application (embodying the product function) balancing the features of uniqueness, authenticity –supporting the brand values by elements that accurately represent the personality of the brand, and consistency –consistent use of signature visual elements maintaining a consistency with the entire product portfolio (Confidential, 2010; Cullen, 2007). Having the customer connected with the brand and the attributes of visual brand language as an extension of the brand is what makes the product authentic and relevant (Lemmon, 2013).

2.2 The brand

The term brand is commonly used speaking of marketing, companies and products. Neumeier (2005) speaks of the brand as a gut feeling defined by individuals. When enough individuals have the same gut feeling the company can be said to have a brand. Thus the brand cannot be defined by the company but influenced by communicating value proposition and brand identity. (Neumeier, 2005) Figure 1 shows the relation between the brand identity and the brand image. Translating the gut feeling to branding terms would be brand image which is how the brand is currently perceived, closely related to brand reputation which is the external assessment of the brand (de Chernatony, 1999). By implementing the brand identity a brand position would be reached and as a result the brand image would be created (Aaker D. A., 2010; Kapferer, 2012). Kapferer (2012) provides a scheme (Figure 1) showing how brand identity is translated to brand image. The implementation of the brand is shown as products, people, places and communication. These signals are interpreted by the receiver influenced by messages sent from competition and noise, resulting in a brand image.
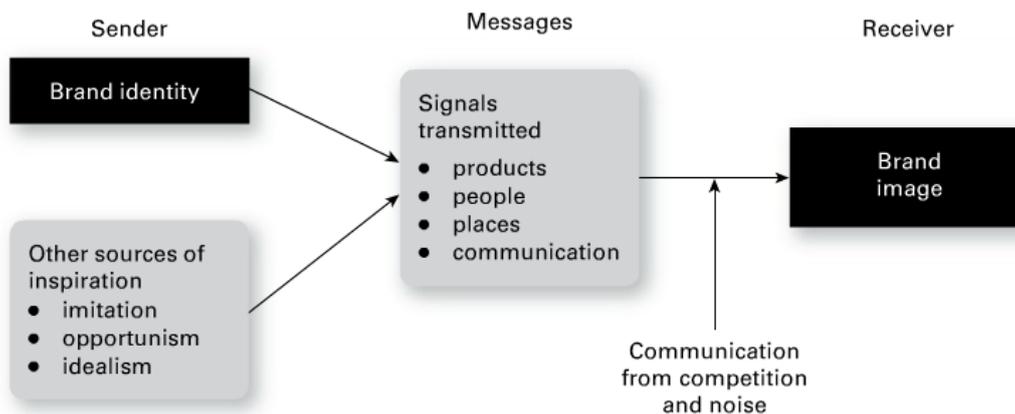
Figure 1. Identity and Image (Kapferer, 2012).

Most companies today define their brands based on different approaches in terms of how they reach their customers. Key questions raised during the process of defining a brand are usually related to 'who' the brand is, 'what' the brand does, and 'why' it matters. Based on these three major questions, the brand can begin to emerge and be identified in relation to the company or business dealing with it. An important aspect particularly is to clearly state who you are and what you do so that the brand is focused. An unfocused brand does not know what it stands for and therefore fails to differentiate themselves. (Neumeier, 2005) The brand identity, being the timeless essence of the brand, provides guidelines not just for how the brand should act in the present-day but also in the future. For example by having a clearly defined brand identity future extension issues can be solved or avoided (Kapferer, 2012).

In terms of companies that matters it has been stated that Apple, for example as a company, is important in terms of the brand it has created. People feel connected to Apple in an emotional way, created by its aesthetically designed products and complete customer experience (Brunner & Emery, 2009). Ries (2012) also claims that one of the main reasons Apple being a strong brand is it being focused (Ries, 2012) as well as Moorman (2012) claiming it to be one of the main reasons for Apple's marketing success (Moorman, 2012). Taking Apple as an example with the connection between the brand being focused and clear in terms of what the company stands for and brand aesthetics, in order to create a successful brand, the importance of aesthetics was further investigated.

The pattern of decision-making is not based on comparing features and benefits in the same extension as before. The purchase choice is now a days based on symbolic attributes; design and lifestyle associated with a brand. (Neumeier, 2005) It has been discovered that to create a brand both strategy and creativity are required, nonetheless many companies fail to bridge this rift, but those who succeed in having a charismatic brand are often found claiming the majority of the market and with a higher price point than generic products. Brands that create strategies and strive for creativity thus usually have a common denominator in their dedication for aesthetics. (Neumeier, 2005) Pamfilie, Procopie and Chiru (2008) suggest aesthetics to offer companies multiple powerful benefits and advantages, ranging from creating an attractive identity allowing for a higher price setting of products to protecting the company against competition's attacks (Pamfilie, Procopie, & Chiru, 2008). Referring to aesthetics as the language of feeling, Neumeier (2005) argues that in the society as it is today, time-poor and profuse with information, people value feeling more than information (Neumeier, 2005).

2.3 Resemblance and differentiation

As in connection to integrating aesthetics in the design process there is a trade-off between creating a resemblance and differentiating the products in terms of design. In order to strengthen the brand the visual attributes of the company should reflect the core values. A brand need to change to keep up with the market without losing its identity. This could be directly reflected in the product development. Products that share the same brand name should have something in common. If products are developed too far branched out from the product portfolio the brand has lost its focus. A product family is categorized by the shared values together with certain physical resemblance. Though if all attributes are necessary to keep its identity it will lose its ability to change, consequently leading to the trade-off (Kapferer, 2012).

With the brand vision and purpose on top and products at its base, the brand can be viewed as a pyramid, see Figure 2. The brand management process is starting at the top defining the products through the core values of the brand and brand personality to make sure that the products carry the same brand essence. Customers on the other hand obtain their perception looking at the pyramid from a bottom-up perspective starting with what is real and tangible. (Kapferer, 2012) This amplifies the importance of being able to communicate the brand through the products.
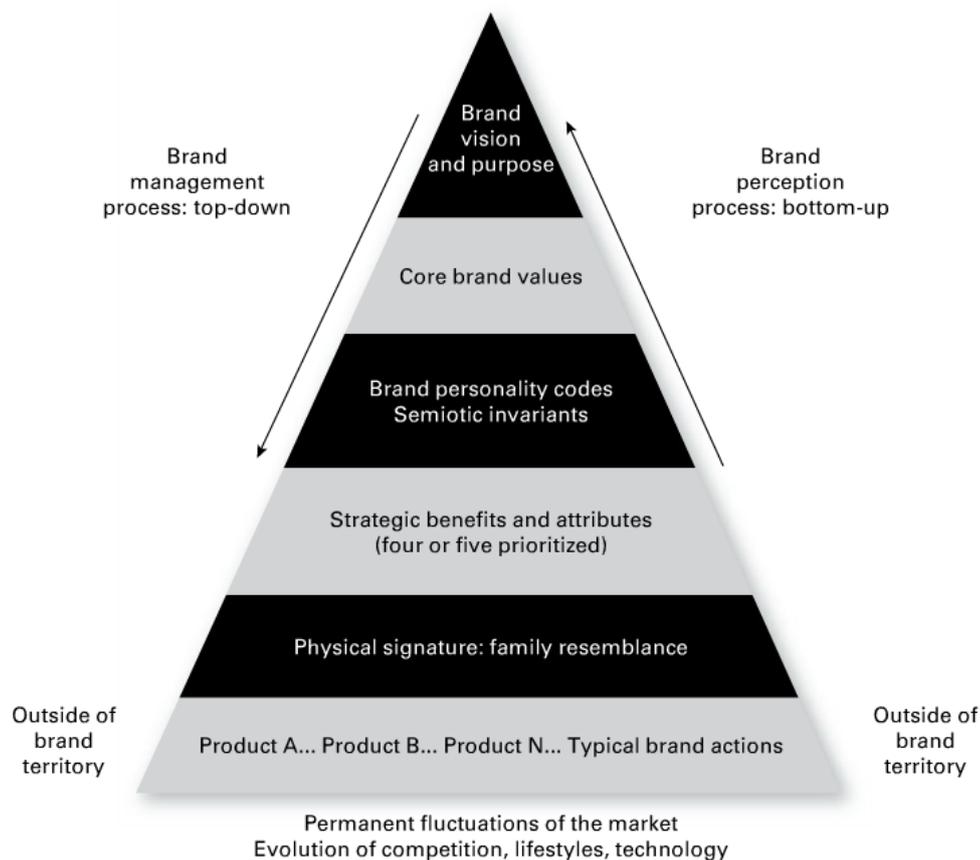

Figure 2. The Brand System (Kapferer, 2012).

2.4 Derivation of the process

Combining research of what makes a brand successful as well as its design with derived information from the interviews, which will be found under "Results from the interviews", similar activities could be found and generalized in order to define a possible process for creating a visual

brand language. Existing visual brand language documents have been studied, but with respect to companies' confidentiality, classified details are not presented in this report.

As shown in Figure 3 the visual aspects of the brand identity are based in the brand promise and the company vision. Therefore to create a visual brand language the vision and brand promise must first be defined. The brand itself can be seen as a promise made to the customers and consumers, whom being the foundation that the brand is built upon, the product is made for them (Lemmon, 2013). In order to establish a relationship this promise must be kept. Thus the brand can also be viewed as a person. In order to establish a positive relationship with the customer, making friends with the customer, there is a need for positively influencing the way they view the brand. By sharing values, being consistent and complementing their lives in some way the friendship can be uphold. As could be derived from everyday life, a strong relationship is more likely to gain forgiveness, during a possible downturn, than no relationship (VanAuken, 2016). As mentioned earlier, the focus being on the visual, the other parts although being important, will not be discussed.
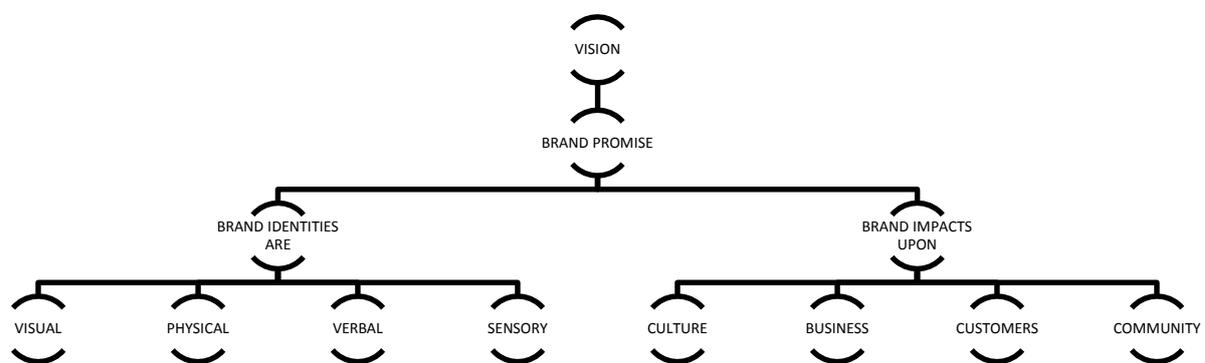

Figure 3. What Is a Brand (Borja De Mozota, 2003)?

Connected to viewing the brand as a person is the brand personality. This typically refers to a set of human characteristics, which is associated with a certain brand (Aaker J. L., 1997). According to Borja De Mozota (2003), people relate to a brand in the same way as they relate to people having things in common such as names, families and life cycles (Borja De Mozota, 2003). Therefore the personality of the brand should be something that the customer would want to relate to and should be reflected in what the company offers. The brand personality is a part of the brand identity (see Figure 4) and is gradually built up by communication (Kapferer, 2012). By using a specific style of writing, design features, colors or even a person the personality can be created. Also a part of the constructed source (picture of the sender) are the physical features, which are evoked in people's minds when the brand name is mentioned. The relationship could be beliefs and association used to symbolize a relationship. As a direct link between the brand and the organization is the culture, which is a set of values on which the brand is basing its behavior. Kapferer (2012) argues this to be the most important facet of brand identity. The reflection and self-image is parts of the constructed receiver (picture of recipient) and is the reflection of the customer, how he or she wants to be perceived when using or buying the product, respectively how he or she feels when using or buying the product. To try to define the brand identity, seven questions should be answered (Kapferer, 2012):

1. What is the brand's particular vision and aim?
2. What makes it different?
3. What need is the brand fulfilling?
4. What is the permanent crusade?

5. What are its value or values?
6. What is its field of competence? Of legitimacy?
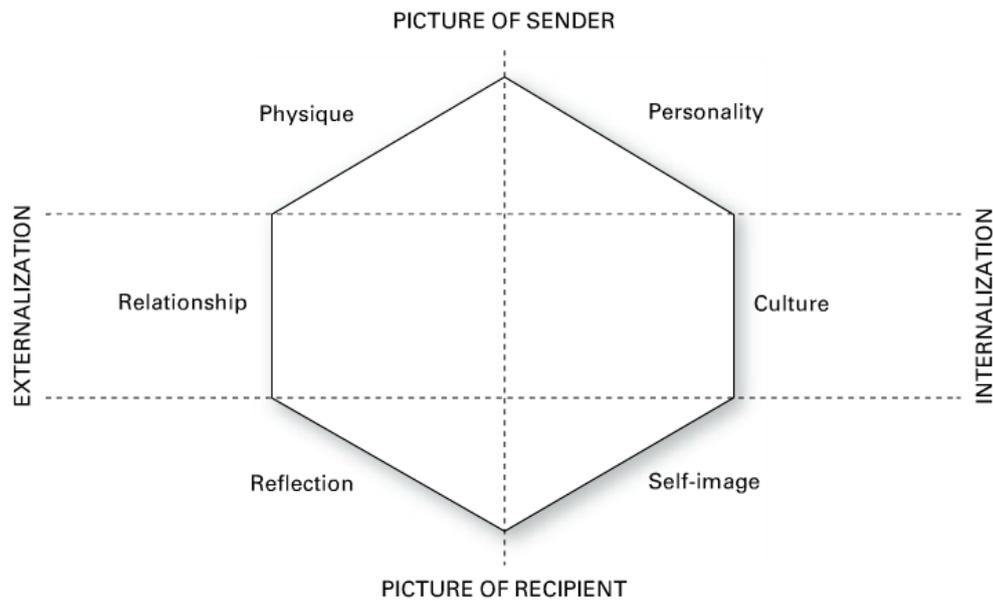7. What are the signs which make the brand recognizable?

Figure 4. Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer, 2012).

Trying to create a brand identity certain approaches can lead to both ineffective and dysfunctional brand strategies by being excessively limited or tactical. These approaches are known as identity traps, see Figure 5. It is important to realize that the focus of the brand is not solely on product attributes, which is the most common trap when creating a brand identity. (Aaker D. A., 2010) Being the main focus of this thesis, one shall be cautious that the brand identity is broader than the product characteristics. Product attributes are not the only relevant bases for customer purchase decisions, a brand is more than a product. An example of this would be an insurance company selling insurances, therefore, focusing only on that would mean omitting other important aspects of the brand. The insurance company does not sell only insurances, rather peace of mind too (Vermeij, 2011).
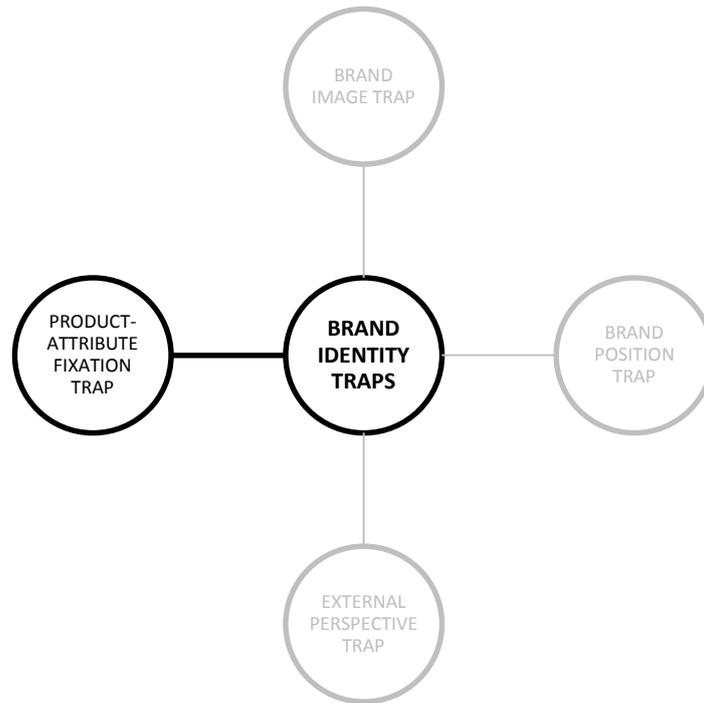
Figure 5. Brand Identity Traps (Aaker D. A., 2010).

Illustrated by Aaker D. A. (2010) in Figure 6, the brand identity is divided in a two-tier structure consisting of the core and extended identity. The core identity is the timeless essence of the brand and does not change even if the brand is extended to new markets. It should reflect the values and principles of the company and also add to developing a connection with the end customer as well as uniqueness and driving purchases. The extended identity is the broader version of the core identity containing methods and details how to further connect with customers and reinforce the core identity. This could be sub brands or logos. (Aaker D. A., 2010)
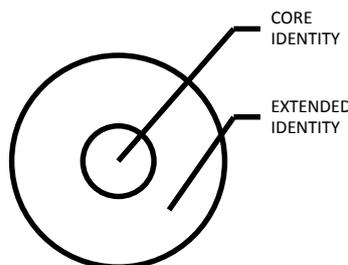

Figure 6. The Identity Structure (Aaker D. A., 2010)

Aaker D. A. (2010) suggests looking at the concept brand with a four-fold perspective, viewing the brand as a product, as an organization, as a person and as a symbol (see Figure 7). Each perspective is distinct and together used to help clarify, differentiate and enrich the brand identity. Depending on the needs of the brand not all perspectives are viable for defining the brand identity. The product thrust is usually a part of the brand core identity. Viewing the brand as a product can help to create a value proposition through physical features or services. The perspective of viewing the brand as an organization focuses on attributes of the organization rather than on the product. Brand as a person is connected to creating a brand-customer relationship and the personality of the

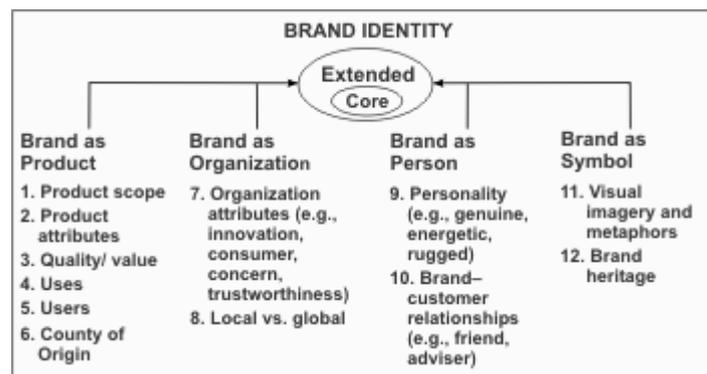brand, and lastly a strong symbol can help gaining recognition and create cohesion. (Aaker D. A., 2010)

Figure 7. Brand Identity Four-Fold Perspective (Aaker D. A., 2010).

Therefore, a first step into the process of creating a visual brand language seems to be strongly connected to how a brand is defined. The brand is defined with its vision, core values, market strategy and core identity. By clearly stating the core values together with explanations, misinterpretation can be avoided. A distinct target audience is essential for accurately communicating the right values, because if one does not know who they are talking to they will not know what to say.

As mentioned earlier, what makes a great product is it being authentic to the brand, which is the goal of the first step, and relevant for the customers. The relevancy of a product design is dependent on what kind of product it is. For example, a tool making company would express their products as durable and strong rather than soft and cozy, because a soft tool would not be relevant for the user.

As such, this relates to the second step in the process: defining the product or products. What kind of product is it and what is its purpose? Emotional attributes consonant with the core values as well as the purpose of the product may be important boundaries for defining the product. These are part of the value proposition of a product, which can be regarded as benefits delivered to provide value for the customer. The three benefits are functional, self-expressive and emotional benefits. The functional benefit is the essence of the product and provides the functional utility. The self-expressive benefit gives the end customer an opportunity to express his or her self by communicating his or her self-image via the brand. In order to add richness and depth to the brand the emotional benefits are created which strives to give the customer a positive feeling when buying or using the brand. (Aaker D. A., 2010; Aaker D. , 2014)

Product attributes, shown in Figure 8, refer to the characteristics that identify and differentiate products. The products need to be differentiated in terms of function as well as core brand values. In order to translate values to visuals, mood boards can be used as a part of a product visioning with associated visual vocabulary, derived from the composition of pictures, and emotional attributes. The strategic pyramid for visual brand language shows how the signature elements are derived from design principles and product attributes which in turn are based in the brand personality as a result of communication of brand core values and identity. Translating the core brand values into a mood board helps to communicate the "look and feel" of the brand (Mumgaard, 2016). Mood boards is an acknowledged method for design and usually used as a support for early design thinking/ feeling (Rieuf, Bouchard, & Aoussat, 2015).
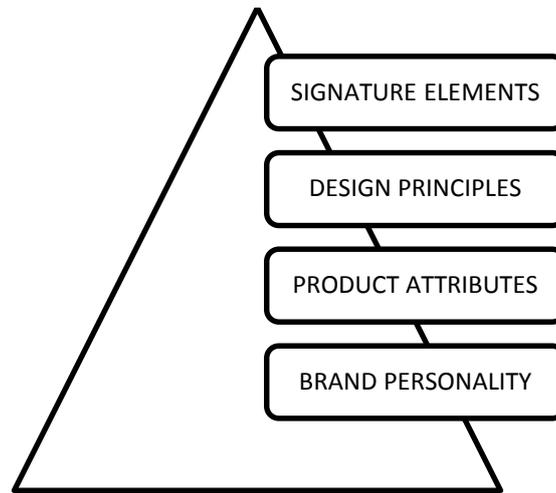
Figure 8. Strategic Pyramid for Visual Brand Language (Mumgaard, 2016).

The visual vocabulary should optimally not just be derived from what can be viewed in the picture composition. Using focus groups the pictures could be broken down to simple visual elements to try to distinguish what exactly makes the picture express for example professionality or stability (2, 2016). Starting with pictures which the majority of the focus group agree on express certain values, these pictures may be broken down into simple visual elements. With the aim to connect shapes, textures and colors to values, it is strived for finding visual elements in the pictures which the majority of the focus group still find consonant with the values strived for to express. It could be an instinctive feeling or a created mental picture. As in the classic Takete-Malumba phenomenon there is a universal perception of the connection between the names and the shapes (see Figure 9). Furthermore while studies suggest that humans generally prefer rounded objects to more angular objects (Bar & Neta, 2006; Dazkir & Read, 2012; Jadva, Hines, & Golombok, 2010; Westerman, o.a., 2012) the question whether or not it is possible to communicate affective information, value and influence human behavior is still being explored. Holland (2009) argues that design in the context of both natural and man-made forms has the purpose of sending a message of a certain experience and to fulfill that promise. Taking examples from nature positional forms (hard edges created when two or more surfaces intersect) suggest precision, accuracy, danger, structure, fidelity and so on. Meanwhile curvature surfaces (when it is visually not possible to tell when one surface ends and another begins) intimate fluidity, elegance, grace, sophistication etcetera (Holland, 2009). Solarski (2016) agrees by associating a circular form with innocence, youth, energy and femininity, a square with maturity, stability, balance and stubbornness and a triangle with aggression, masculinity and force (Solarski, 2016).
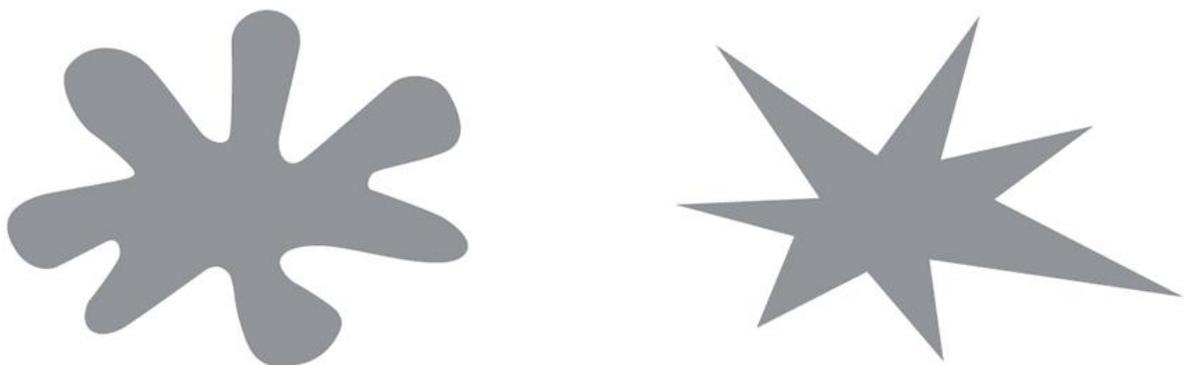

Figure 9. Takete-Malumba, Malumba to the left and Takete to the right.

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Such understanding leads to the third and final step, which is defining the shape. The defined shapes does preferably reflect both the brand identity as well as the function of the product. As a result of research using focus groups or acknowledged information a visual vocabulary envisioning the emotional attributes and core values can be created together with a mood board. The products designed should fit the same product portfolio and in turn be related to the mood board. Signature visual brand language elements should be chosen with constraints for variation, usage and positioning guidelines. Signature elements should be exclusive to the brand, thus located on parts that are not shared with alternate brands. Other design principles should be less restricted to allow for innovation and to keep up with the market.

From the methodology described in regards to the data collection, results were obtained contributing to validation of the conclusions drawn from literature. In this chapter the interviews conducted are presented, with the information, which was acquired from these, as well as the short survey conducted at ROL Ergo and the corresponding results.

3.1 Results from the interviews

The data was collected from four interviews. The people interviewed had all conducted the process of developing a visual brand language for one or more companies. They all agreed on not having a specified process, which they followed creating the visual brand language, but collected different more or less recognized methods to reach a result. Their viewpoints and processes are presented below.

3.1.1 Interview 1

– US Director of business development/ Senior Designer from an industrial design consulting firm specializing in product development

A visual brand language is esthetics, attributes that the product communicates. The visual brand language is supposed to represent the core brand values and be a balanced mix of design principles. First of all it is important that the brand is well defined with a vision, position and a personality. Sometimes it does not exist or the company want to change it. The company also has to evaluate where they are and where they want to be in the future. After defining the core values, visual characteristics are determined. Signature elements are chosen as well as channel elements and elements for different price levels. Guidelines for how they should be applied on different products are created together with the use of logotype and font.

An actual visual brand language guideline document for a company was reviewed, for education purposes, prior to finding the steps of the process. First of all, the purpose of the visual brand language, specific for the company, was stated together with an explanation of what a visual brand language consist of. According to the document a visual brand language is built up using the logotype, colors, finishes, shapes and details. It also claims that a visual brand language leads to increased productivity and increased brand value. Following, the company's core brand values are listed and a mood board is displayed, showing the visual characteristics of the brand. An overview of the design process is visualized to show the implementation of the visual brand language in the process. The visual brand language signature elements are explained together with usage and positioning guidelines. Different distribution channels have their own unique set of visual brand language elements to add to differentiation between distribution channels. These visual brand language elements are also dependent on the price level. Lastly a number of products from the brand assortment with applied visual brand language are displayed.

3.1.2 Interview 2

– Swedish Chief designer, R&D User interface and Graphic design from Viking Sewing Machines.

The process started by creating a mood board based on the brand personality and brand voice, and documenting what currently could be found in the market. Creating a resemblance in product families, sub-brands were kept separated with different visual brand languages. Working with personas was an essential part for developing and designing products to fulfill the target group's needs.

3.1.3 Interview 3

– US Creative director and designer from a design, research and photographic documentary studio.

With a presentation based approach to the interview an example of a process resulting in a visual brand language for a German company was shown. The first step was to map and try to define current design language for the company as well as for competitors in order to evaluate the position. A competitive position is most desired. The next step was to review the brand strategy and statement, how will the brand compete in the market? The company needs a clear position and the visual brand language should direct the company towards its desired market position. Going through the core values of the company a few were selected as a foundation in developing the visual brand language. The core values were then divided into more tangible visual properties and with mood boards a reference to visual properties and characteristics could be created. The visual brand language strategy architecture is illustrated as a pyramid (Figure 10) identifying how the process moves from the core brand values to a visual design theory resulting in applied examples. When a visual brand language is defined it can be used for political purposes in large companies by justifying suggested designs.
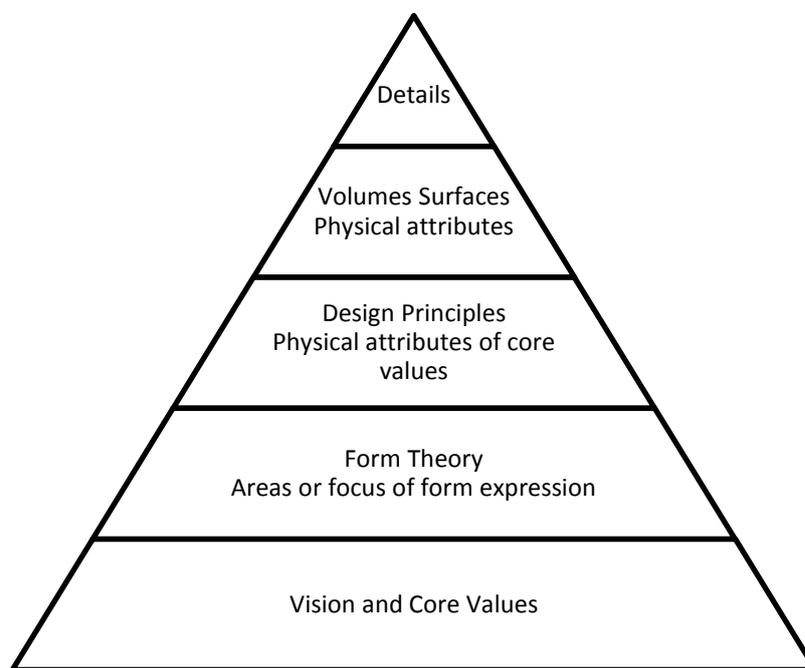
```
                    Details

            Volumes Surfaces
            Physical attributes

            Design Principles
        Physical attributes of core
                  values

              Form Theory
        Areas or focus of form expression

            Vision and Core Values
```

Figure 10. Visual brand language strategy architecture.

In this case too, an actual visual brand language guideline document was received and studied in order to compose the steps of the process. This document was initiated with a product competitor analysis using positional maps. Secondly the actions required for creating a new visual brand language, which would direct the brand towards it desired market position, was stated. These were reviewing the brand strategy, looking at how design would support the brand value as well as reviewing the main product architecture elements, and finally to schedule product development for brand evolution into the future. Following, the core values were chosen, elaborated and visualized in mood boards to create a reference to visual properties and characteristics. A chart was displayed explaining the areas of the product development activity where the visual brand language would be most relevant and influential. Next, a pyramid shaped chart is shown identifying how the details are based in the brand values by having the brand values in the bottom, the visual design theory in the middle and the applied design at the top of the pyramid (Figure 10). Finally, design principles are explained and visualized followed by a design platform and product designs with applied visual brand language.

3.1.4 Interview 4

– Swedish Design entrepreneur and Senior lecturer of technology at Jönköping University.

The process started by defining the core values and if there were any elements that expressed the brand. Having selected certain words for the products to express the task was to translate those words into shapes, colors and textures. The current product assortment was analyzed in order to find products that expressed those words more than others with the question of why they did that. Mood boards were created and using focus groups pictures were broken down into elements to try to define what shapes and lines could express what words. Finding out the shapes and colors desired, design principles and signature elements were chosen.

3.2 Results from the survey

A short survey was sent out at ROL Ergo to identify what 'words' would represent the company and their products according to the employees and also how well they were aware of the colors connected to the ROL Ergo. The questions, which can be found in Appendix B, were sent out via email generating a response rate of 71,7 %. The result showed a diffuse picture of the brand.

Most employees recognized the colors connected to ROL Ergo as black and white. A few also recalled the colors to be red, grey and a scheme of colors consonant to the new graphic profile of ROL Ergo. Other colors were also recalled, some only by one person. A large number of words were attained from the two questions requesting three words connected to ROL Ergo as a company and three words connected to its products. Words frequently recurrent in both questions were innovative and customer focused. Other words that were mentioned a few times; for the company – expansive, unstructured, flexible and entrepreneurial, and for the products – functional and quality. Many words were mentioned only once or twice, thus indicating a somewhat diffuse picture of the brand. However, the generic employee seemed to view the company as innovative and exciting but somewhat unstructured, and the products as innovative, functional but too modest in terms of visual design.

The outcome of this thesis is a suggested standardized process that could be used to develop a visual brand language, and is presented in this chapter. The process was obtained by analyzing literature and existing research regarding the area of design in the sense of branding and product design, and comparing that information with what was found in the collected data through interviews. A summary of the literature review can be found in the chapter "Frame of Reference" and the data collected are presented under "Results".

Based in literature review and data collection the major process consists of three steps. The suggested three-step process, illustrated in Figure 11, of developing a visual brand language is initiated with defining the brand with its brand identity including the core values, vision and market strategy. As a part of the market strategy; market position, competitors and target audience are integral to this process and therefore need to be defined early in the process. The main reason for starting with defining the brand is to make the designed product authentic to the brand. Moreover, this follows onto the definition process for the product or products, which is in line with the value proposition consisting of the functional, self-expressive and emotional benefits. These defining aspects seem crucial for assisting the design of products that are relevant to the end customers and their needs. Lastly, mood boards seem relevant in allowing for a decision in the actual design in terms of reflecting the foundation in the brand and product definition via shapes, colors and textures that will express the brand and highlight the benefits of the product, resulting in the product being both authentic to the brand and relevant for the people who buy it.
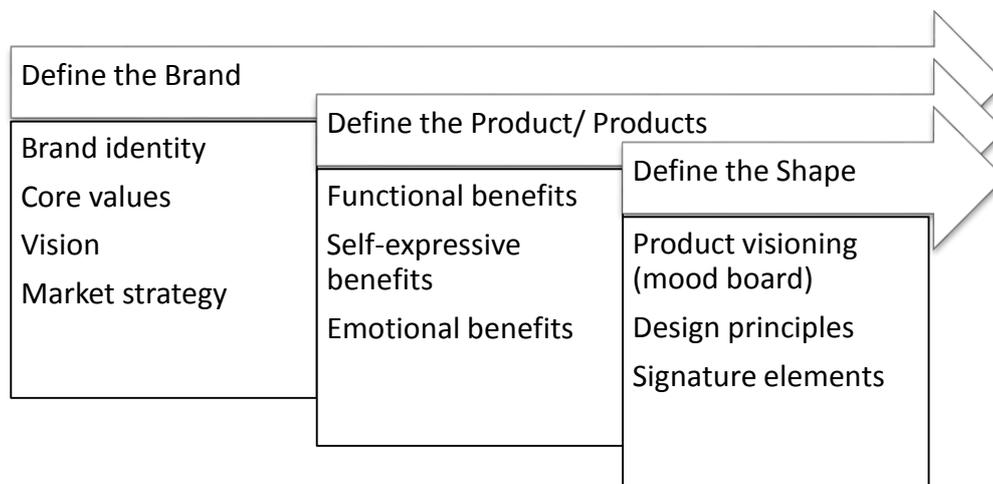

Figure 11. The process of developing a visual brand language based on the literature synthesis and results of the study.

The first step was established finding out the importance of having a well-defined brand in order to build a meaningful company. What actually makes a company meaningful is the brand, consequently leading to a company-customer relationship by having a brand which the end customers feel enriches their lives in some way. The core of the brand is the brand identity acting as the sender in the illustration (Figure 1) provided by Kapferer (2012). The same illustration shows the brand image as what is received through the signals transmitted, one of the four being products. Together with the illustration (Figure 3) provided by Borja De Mozota (2003), a strong relation between the visual design of the products and brand identity is confirmed. This

relationship is also verified through the interviews where two interviewees specifically highlighted the importance of starting the process by defining the brand.

Based in the optimal product design, as found when searching for information and confirmed in an interview, being both relevant to the customer and authentic to the brand, the importance of defining the product arises. In literature, the value proposition of a product can be divided in three types of benefits: functional, self-expressive and emotional. The two latter being connected to the brand and the core values.

The third step is creating the actual visual brand language, in the sense of product design. All interviewees agreed on using one or more mood boards to reach their desired result. The mood boards were used to facilitate the process of connecting the design back to the core values of the brand as well as get an overall feeling of the desired product. Moreover, being an acknowledged method for product development when designing products, it becomes a crucial element as part of the final step. This mood board could also be displayed in the visual brand language guide to help readers understand the feeling to be expressed through the product design. The design principles and signature elements are the essence of the visual brand language guide. The design principles allow for more variation whereas signature elements are more specific.

5 IMPLEMENTATION

Exploring the process of developing a visual brand language, a suggested standardized process was developed. Based in research results, personal observations and discussions with people at ROL Ergo, a brief implementation of the developed process was conducted. Below, this implementation of the suggested process is presented with parts of an example of a visual design consonant with the core values of the company. With respect to ROL Ergo's confidentiality, only parts of the suggested visual brand language are presented in this thesis.

5.1 Defining ROL Ergo

Being a company rapidly growing in the market, the need for a defined vision and brand identity increases. The company management has according to interviews raised awareness regarding the opportunity to create a new, distinct and improved brand identity and vision. This was confirmed through the short survey that was sent out to employees of the company. The result of the survey showed a diffuse picture of the brand among employees. By having a diffuse picture of what the company stands for the opportunity to create and implement a new vision and brand identity increases since no other vision or identity has to be suppressed. ROL Ergo is currently, as this thesis is written, working with developing a new brand identity and vision. Figure 12 shows a suggested identity prism for ROL Ergo. This identity prism was developed through personal observations and discussions with people at the company. An overall vision has also been elaborated on and a suggestion was: "When we act, we change things for the better", suggesting innovative ideas and smarter solutions. This vision adds pressure to the development department in the importance of being a market leader.
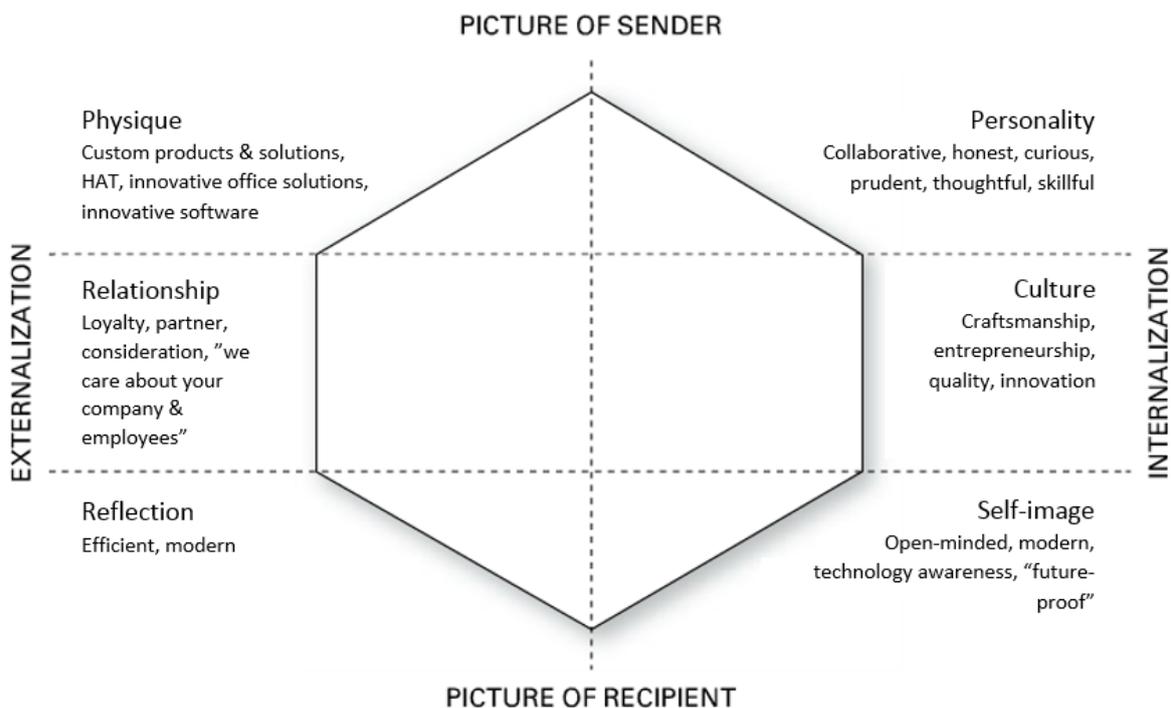

Figure 12. ROL Ergo suggested identity prism.

From the illustration above core values can be extracted and elaborated. As described in the frame of reference, the culture part of the identity prism often contain values of the company which can be elaborated further. These values together with words to be connected to the values are illustrated in Figure 13. By elaborating the core values, a better understanding can be reached and shared.
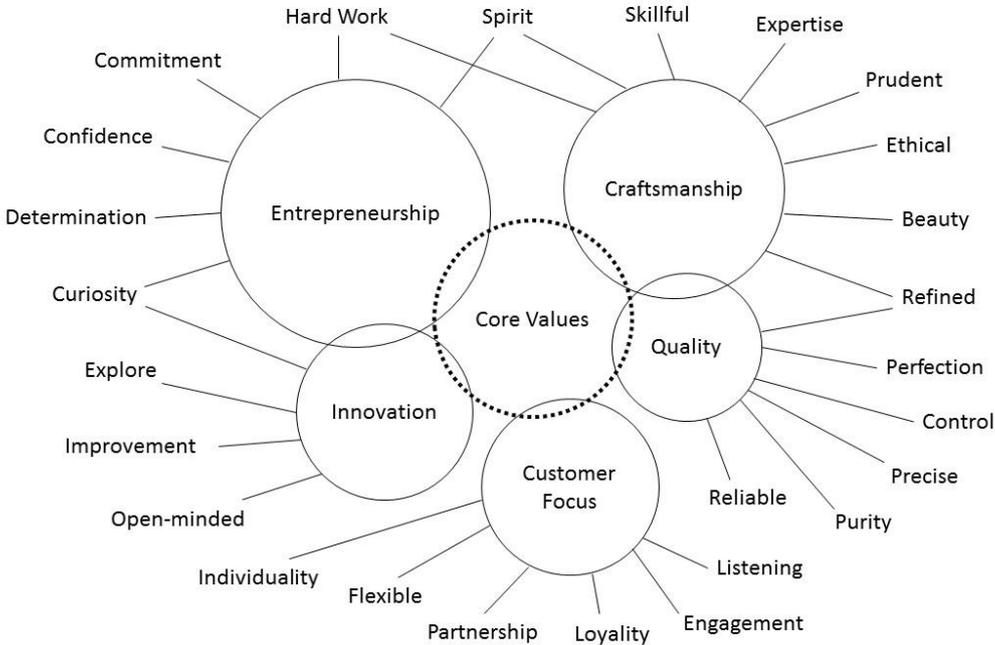

Figure 13. Core values, elaborated.

Using the core values and describing words, mood boards could be created as a reference to visual properties and characteristics. These words may be communicated through everything the company does and that goes beyond just the product.

5.2 Defining the product

The product to focus on is a new digital control and information unit with a user interface developed for office workers. Being a product currently under development, the features of the product are not defined in order to preserve competitive advantages.

Viewing the product briefly in functional benefits the product is supposed to display information to the user in a clear way. The product is also a control unit which the user can interact with.

Emotional and self-expressive benefits can be found in the brand identity prism called self-image and reflection. These benefits can be elaborated further to fit the particular product type. The self-expressive benefits are being efficient and modern, but also being technology aware and as an employer, caring both for the company and its employees. The emotional benefits are feeling open-minded, technology aware, modern and included for getting updates, and as an employer "future-proof".

5.3 *Defining the shape*

As a first step of defining the shape, a mood board[1] was created. Using words connected to the core values as well as words connected to the value proposition of the product, pictures were collected from different websites. The pictures collected were explained with intended feelings or words to create a greater understanding.

The shape could consist of clean surfaces expressing the purity of quality. The finish can reflect the core values quality and craftsmanship by working with precision, perfection and refinement, showing the skill and expertise in the craftsmanship spirit. Individuality can be expressed through choice of materials, shapes, textures and colors.

Proposed onsets for guidelines for the design are as follows. For design principles a basic shape should be chosen as a main shape, such as a rectangle, square or circle. All angles should be perpendicular to create these shapes. Radius, no curves, should be applied on corners. When two shapes intersect they should keep their original shape to create distinctive elements. Straight sides and clean surfaces may be strived for to express purity of quality and control. Assembly elements should be hidden from the user view in order to make the product more approachable, also creating the clean surfaces. Elements should strive for symmetry and to be as concentric as possible. A tight radius should be chosen on edges. When smooth transition between heights are needed or to create a smaller look, chamfers are preferred over large radiuses. To emphasize the feeling of innovativeness and "high-tech" crisp screens should be used when screens are needed. This is connected to the definition of the product. To create a high quality feeling, parts should fit tightly together. For signature elements the use of metal is important to represent the history of ROL Ergo. Using finely brushed aluminum with a precision engraved logotype both quality and craftsmanship are expressed. For products with a screen, the graphic design is of great importance for communication of core values.

Some of the suggested design principles above can be found in the visual example in Figure 14. The example shows the use of metal, the straight sides and the clean surfaces. A tight radius is applied on the edges and all angles are perpendicular. As a main shape, a cylinder is used and the design is concentric. Finally no assembly elements are visible. By implementing these design principles the aim is to create a coherent product portfolio and make the product express purity, quality, control, craftsmanship, "high-tech" and to make it approachable.

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[1] For legal reasons the mood board is not presented in this thesis.
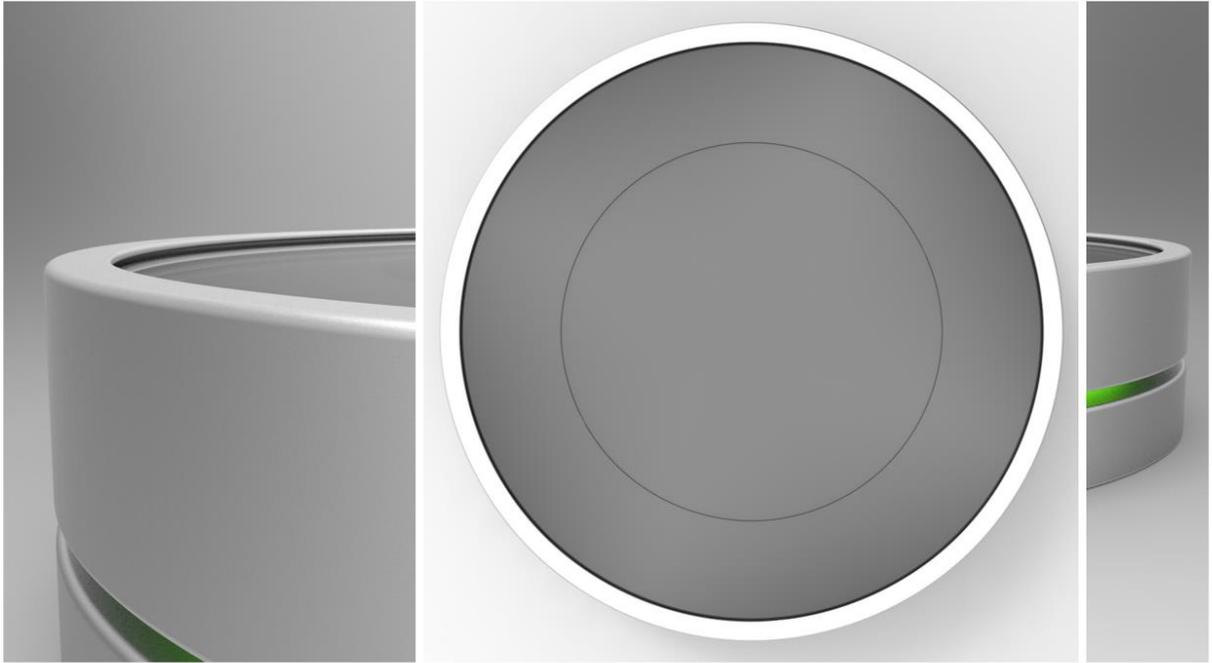
Figure 14. Parts of the suggested design for the control unit using chosen design principles.

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter a discussion of the analysis and results can be found. The applicability of the process for different types of companies is discussed with basis in the question of how it is possible to create a visual brand language as a supplier, thus having customers with own visual brand languages to please. During the work, conclusions has been drawn based in the analysis. These conclusions are presented in this chapter with intention to answer the stated research questions.

6.1 Discussion

The main research question addressed throughout this thesis is to explore the process of developing a visual brand language and explore if such process follows more or less standardized patterns throughout various companies or practitioners in the field in terms of the elements it consists of. Throughout the research process, data collected pointed to that there were currently no standardized ways of dealing with such process. These findings gave uprising to the question of how companies can seek a more standardized process of implementing visual brand language for the major reason that visual brand language impacts brand recognition and aids companies in creating an image with which customers relate to.

Finding a gap in research regarding visual brand language suggests that there is no current standardized process of developing a visual brand language. However, there seem to be an uprising need for integrating industrial design, in terms of principles and methods, in the development process and therefore a need for a visual brand language, facilitating the process of integrating industrial design in the development process. Few studies suggest that design improves a company's image, its coherence, and its differentiation from competitors (Mozota, 2003). In larger companies, a visual brand language could be of political significance. When time to market is most essential and there is a lot of decisions to be made from a management point of view, the visual brand language guide can be used to justify a new design. The gap found in the literature review indicates a need for more research in this area, regarding both benefits and methods that can be used to derive such guide.

The interviews conducted revealed that there are common methods used when developing a visual brand language. One of the interviewed people specifically claimed to have searched for information regarding how to develop a visual brand language. When not finding a process to follow, the interviewee turned to the work group with the aim to create a visual brand language without specific guidelines to follow. This way of working was similar to another interviewee, creating a visual brand language without the use of specific guidelines. With the aim of creating a visual brand language, only once, the process of doing so was not clearly documented, but could be somewhat reversed engineered by following the result backwards. Most visual brand language documents are completely confidential, thus not many of these could be studied in detail. The other two interviewees had been developing a visual brand language more than once and for different companies. They both had common approaches that they used or integrated in the process. None of them seemed to have specifically stated the process, but had a good idea of what the process consisted of. Based on what their clients needed the details could vary, but with the same overall process.

The need for a stated process might be greater for novel designers since the process and thinking when designing a new product family might come more natural for experienced designers. For experienced designers, the process could possibly better be used as a checklist. Having their own established methods it can be verified that all needed results of the process have been obtained. For novel designers the process can give a guidance of how to approach the task of creating a

visual brand language. For a more structured process, the different steps could be developed further with more specific methods to apply at each step. This would make the process even more efficient. The process developed requires knowledge about design and general design methods and is therefore developed to be used by designers. The first step of the process, "Defining the brand", is preferably already established within the company, otherwise marketing knowledge and strategic thinking are also required. From a management point of view, the process can be seen as a way to structure the project. Furthermore, the process could be generally applicable, in other words not restricted to certain companies or products.

The second research question targets the problem of creating a visual brand language as a supplier when customer specific requirements have to be met. Even though the process should not be restricted to certain companies, a company producing and selling products designed by their customers faces difficulties when developing their own visual brand language. Companies striving to have their own visual brand language do not want to compromise their visual design with other companies' visual design of a product, since it usually results in a weakening of their own visual brand language. Therefore this process might be most suitable and applicable for B2C (business-to-consumer) companies who do not have to meet customer requirements in terms of visual design. Despite this, a B2B (business-to-business) company would theoretically still be able to utilize this process if the aim was to develop their own visual brand language, and would acquire the same benefits in terms of recognition, coherence, etcetera. The problem arises when the B2B customers have requirements in visual design. Suggested ways to develop a visual brand language despite being such a B2B company are either to develop a branch or sub brand within the company with a B2C strategy or to create some sort of standard assortment or collection where customer customization of the products are limited. This is the case of ROL Ergo and thus, these solutions seem to me most applicable for the company. Creating a B2C sub brand may be considered with caution since a brand competing with customer brands might result in a loss of important customers. If creating a sub brand, the market position could be chosen not competing with current or potential customers. In the case of ingredient branding, a brand becomes an extra value connected to other brands. An example of this is Intel Inside (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2010). However, this is somewhat disconnected to a visual brand language since the ingredient brands are usually not visible, except for a logotype, on the final product. In the cases where the products of the ingredient brand are visible there might be an opening of creating a visual brand language to help customers showcase the brand used in their products. Though this will automatically compromise on their own visual brand language and will probably require a very strong ingredient brand with high influence on customer purchase decisions.

All four interviewees had been or were currently working with creating visual brand languages in the B2C sector. By comprehending the processes used by these practicing designers the resulting process could be said to be verified by acceptance. This would thus be verified in the B2C sector. By logical reasoning there would be no difference in the process of creating a visual brand language in a B2B situation, but in the need for it.

The process that the work resulted in was very general and developed to fit a wide range of companies. Depending on the need of the company different stages can be weighted differently. Translating the core values and value proposals to shapes, colors and textures requires a knowledge of how different shapes, colors and textures are actually perceived. This area needs further research to facilitate the process developed. Knowing how design communicates values, through product design, accompanies a great competitiveness which might lead to a struggle obtaining such information. This raises the question of whether or not it is possible to design an object according to created rules of how it should be perceived. If it is possible it might also in the future be possible to automate the design process by adding core values which could link to different shapes from a created library and thereby generate a couple of designs which theoretically would communicate the stated values. In need of further research are also geographic and cultural differences in

perception of colors, shapes and textures. Some shapes or colors might be universally recognized as certain feelings, such as the Takete-Malumba phenomenon, whereas some are definitely not. Christina Wang (2015) highlights some differences in color meanings around the world.

Implementing the process by creating a draft of a visual brand language for ROL Ergo, the brand had to be defined since there was currently no established brand identity. The whole process was only briefly implemented because of time constraints and therefore an exhaustive implementation is still needed to evaluate the process properly. Since focus was on the process of creating a visual brand language for product design, market strategy and competitors were not considered in this implementation. Though this part is as important for designing for a certain strategy. The core values could also be developed further to be more distinctive. Defining the product, it was not completely clear what the product was. The product was to be some sort of control unit and hub. Being a product new to the market the most essential visual design criteria that was given was for the product to have a touch screen, the size and that the product was to be found in an office environment on a desk. The commissioner for the certain product design also wished for the product to be round, restricting the design possibilities in terms of shape. As mentioned earlier further research is needed in the area of visual design perception and how different shapes, colors and textures communicate values. That was rediscovered when attempting to implement the final step of the process. Having core values and thoughts about the products, designs were developed. Consequently discovering that the core values were a bit too generic to create differentiation. Differentiation can be created solely by design but underlying core values are important to create a depth. Translating the core values and value proposition to visual design was challenging, hence the need for more research in the area of visual design perception. Signature elements are also something that could be present on all products in order to create a coherence in the product portfolio. Because of that a lot of consideration has to be taken when deciding on those. Therefore not many signature elements were suggested for the visual brand language for ROL Ergo. Additionally the importance of defining the brand in order to have a foundation to build upon was reinforced by people at the marketing department who had been working towards the same goal.

6.2 Conclusions

By analyzing different patterns that companies use to communicate through product design, we can explore the process of how a visual brand language can be developed in the form of a visual brand language guideline document, in order to enhance recognition of a brand through product design. When the logotype can be visible, the visual brand language is used to enhance recognition of the brand and create a coherence. For companies that are not allowed to have their logotype visible on the products there is an opportunity to create brand recognition through a visual brand language while still meeting customer requirements, particularly for B2B relations.

Exploring this process may lead to a greater understanding in terms of developing a more standardized process for companies to follow when it comes to implementing a visual brand language, by making designs that communicate their brands without losing their unique way of creating recognition for their brand. A visual brand language helps improve a company's image, its coherence, and its differentiation from competitors and therefore, this thesis is one step ahead in exploring this relevant aspect for companies that are found in similar case as ROL Ergo, investigated in this paper.

Moreover, the overall process seem to consist of three major steps which are; defining the brand, defining the product and defining the shape, shown in Figure 11. Following this process, companies can begin to explore how they can communicate and be recognized in a more effective way by their customers. However, this process may not necessarily lead to successful recognition per se since further applicability and testing of the guidelines by other companies may be needed

to make such conclusion. Though, it can be considered as one piece with which design teams in organizations can begin with in order to create unique visual brand languages specific to the needs of the companies and by adjusting the process to those needs as well. As discussed in previous subsection, the process may be applicable even for suppliers or B2B companies, but the need for it requires more extended exploration that is outside the scope of this master thesis.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

This chapter presents recommendations for future work. Using this study as a basis, further research can be made regarding the validity and applicability of the process. There is also an opportunity to make the process more detailed with specific methods for each step and hence possibly more efficient.

This study indicates that there could be a standardized process for developing a visual brand language. From literature studies and interviews the process is suggested to consist of three major steps. Since the process has not yet been evaluated there is an opportunity to do so and thereby confirm this to be an applicable standardized process for creating a visual brand language. Upon validation, this process serves as a basis for further research on the process of creating a visual brand language. There might be an opportunity to develop the process into a more detail process with more specified methods to use. The process could also be validated in terms of applicability for different companies. By making the process more specified the process might be more efficient, but also limited to certain types of companies. Further research could possibly answer the question of whether it would be more efficient to have different processes for different types of companies or an as detailed as possible standardized process applicable to the majority of companies.

Though this study does not serve as a basis for further research on how to communicate values through design, it does highlight the importance of it. Research in this area would add great value to this study and the process developed.

9 TABLE OF FIGURES

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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1. Tell me about the process of developing a visual brand language.
2. Is there a standardized process for developing such a visual brand language?

APPENDIX B: SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. What color or colors would you say represent ROL Ergo?
2. What three words would you use to describe ROL Ergo as a company?
3. What three words would you use to describe ROL Ergo's products?