



A STUDY ON ICONIC ELEMENT FOR ESTABLISHING DESIGN IDENTITY STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT:

The product identity which puts the center in the means value for the sale and promotion in the past, is now beginning to play the role of as a effective message for the communication between the corporation and the customer. But it is too difficult for the customer to communicate with the corporation by only the conceptual brand identity and the statement presenting abstractive philosophy of the corporation. So when establishing product identity, it is necessary to consider the design elements appearing in the usage of the product as the closest contact point for the customer. This research is focused on product identity's role and strategy in the context of communication among the corporation, product and customer. The result of this research is the frame work for the process of establishing design identity based on the expressive element representing user experience through the usage. And there was a proposal of hypothesis on 'iconic element' that constructs the core product identity and this was examined by case studies.

1. INTRODUCTION

As a concrete contact point between corporate and customers, product is strong means for establishing design identity. But up to the present, the core model of constructing design identity was the external areas of the product including promotion activities, not mainly belonging the product design itself. However, in case of these activities' not considering the context of use and experience by product, it is difficult to make corporate's design identity into intentional image.

So to speak, as to establishing product identity, we have to consider the essential elements of product before making expansion of the assistant tools like brand name, advertising and online user community and so on. This study is to propose a framework to inquire how microscopic elements of the product can appear to be the macroscopic design identity in the communicative process between corporate and customer, after understanding the role of product as communication media.

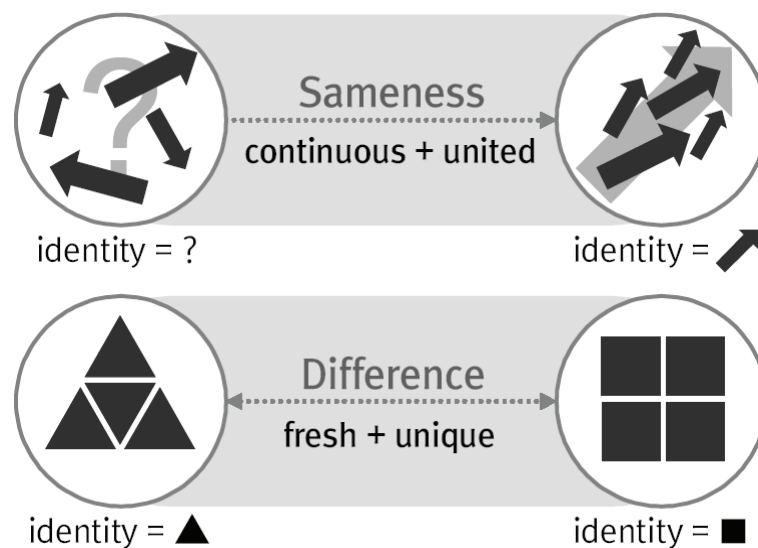
In this research, the following topics can become to be treated seriously.

1. Systematic analysis against the product design element which composes the product as a communication media from market.
2. The categories and levels of the user's perception shown spontaneously from the customers who regard the enterprise and the product.
3. Design identity framework for a strategic enforcement from a position of the enterprise through fundamental consideration of 1 and 2.
4. Case analysis for confirming the usefulness of this design identity framework.

2. PREREQUISITE OF RESEARCH : THE CONCEPT OF 'IDENTITY'

2.1. INTERNAL SAMENESS-EXTERNAL DIFFERENTIATION

According to a (German-born) American psychoanalyst, Erik H. Erikson, identity is 'identical within oneself eternally' and it means 'self-sameness', namely, self-continuity, singleness, uniqueness and inalterability. In addition, it includes the meaning of forming the differentiation of oneself that is subjective and independent from other objects through such 'selfness.' Therefore, inner identity (sameness) can be achieved when forming the quality of objectiveness not through disruption and controversy between various features consisting of the object, but through unity and consistency in them and the concept of identity can be established when attaining the concept of outside differentiation through this.

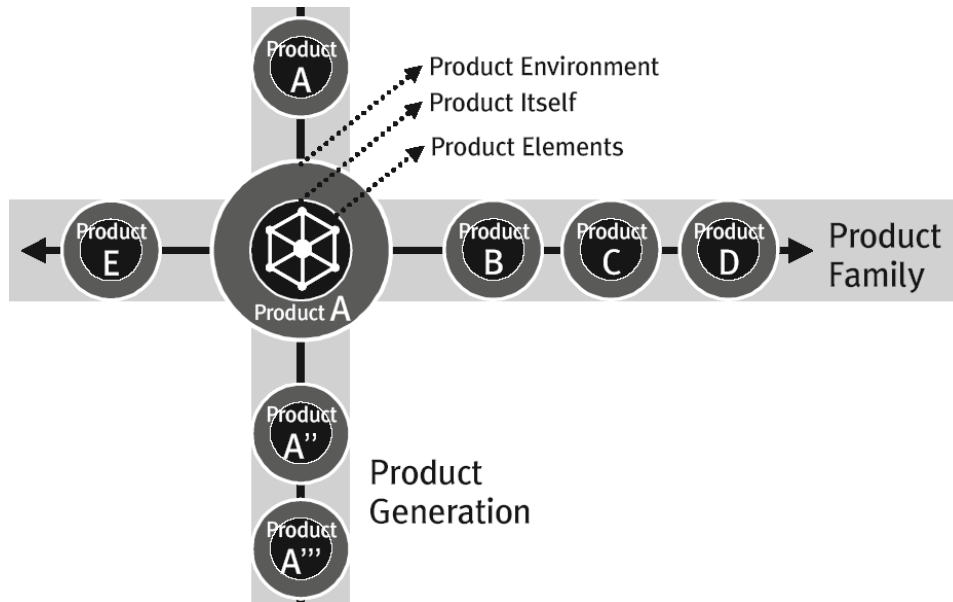


[fig 2] Comparison of internal Sameness and external Differentiation

2.2. SYNCHRONIC AXIS - DIACHRONIC AXIS

There is another premise of the standard for the judgment in the previously discussed sameness and differentiation. It is time and spatial dimension for the object. That is to say, in terms of sameness, it is possible to investigate two directions of how strongly the object has the self-sameness in timely continuity and how much unified directions various features immanent in the

object aim at a certain time period. Likewise, with regards to differentiation, it is possible to conduct a two-way investigation for how much differentiation the object has regardless of past and present and whether an object among various objects has relative uniqueness compared to other objects existing in a certain time period.



[fig 3] Product identity in synchronic and diachronic axis

2.3. THE UNIVERSAL - THE PARTICULAR (CORE FEATURE - EXTENDED FEATURE)

Lastly, an important premise is core-ness and expandability in the study on design identity. This can be replaced by the inalterability and variability. According to the identity system model suggested by David A. Aaker, identity in brand is composed of core identity, the most central part, and expansion identity, the supplementary structure that makes core identity more perfect. The former is the core of brand regardless of time and it signifies association reactions that are not likely to be changed even when inserting the brand in new markets or products. On the contrary, the latter is not the core element such as core identity, but it becomes a detailed element for the performance of all functions of brand identity that enables people to better memorize the attributes, characteristics, scope, types, etc. related to products. Namely, the said two structures of core-ness and expandability aim at the life traits that can absorb something new into the characteristics of unique objects and grow further, while being continuously adapted to the flow of time and change of environment.

2.4. DESIGN IDENTITY AS A MEDIA IN BRAND COMMUNICATION

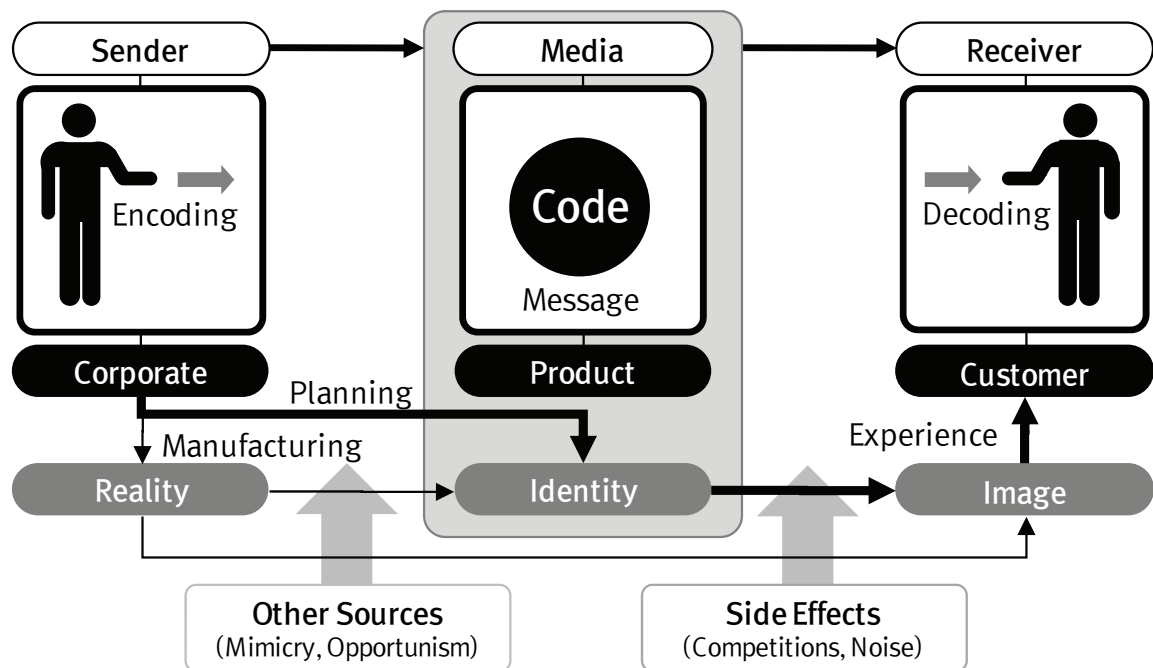
Communication theory model is designed to understand overall situations and context for the purpose of grasping dynamics in which design identity is formed, delivered, and perceived, by means of a bigger picture with design identity on it. Based on this model, it is possible to consider market situations faced by product design of a brand. In other words, the communication relation of sender-media-receiver can be put into that of company-product design-customer in the market. In the course, one can catch what constitutes brand communication and how the elements of it work with each other.

As sender of communication, that is, deliverer, a company functions as a party of manufacturing products. However, it not only produces goods, but also defines identity of those goods as their products in the market.

A customer, as receiver, has various experiences about products of a company by purchasing and using them. Unlike customers in the past who had almost no other choice but to purchase goods from companies, customers today interact with a company, by expressing diversified and positive reactions and expectations to a product.

In the communication model, it is the very sign that serves as media between sender and receiver. This may refer to so-called 'useful experience' provided for its customer by a company through its products. Therefore, a product becomes media containing the form and meaning. In this case, the issue on how to create design identity includes not only the question of what kind of message to deliver, but also how to deliver, or in which way to deliver.

In short, it can be said that design identity thus intermediates between sender and receiver from a broader point of view, while having an internal structure as the sign of such communication from a narrower point of view. Dynamics for design identity of this kind can be diagrammed as follows.



[fig 1] a premise for processing this research

3. FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING DESIGN IDENTITY EXPRESSION

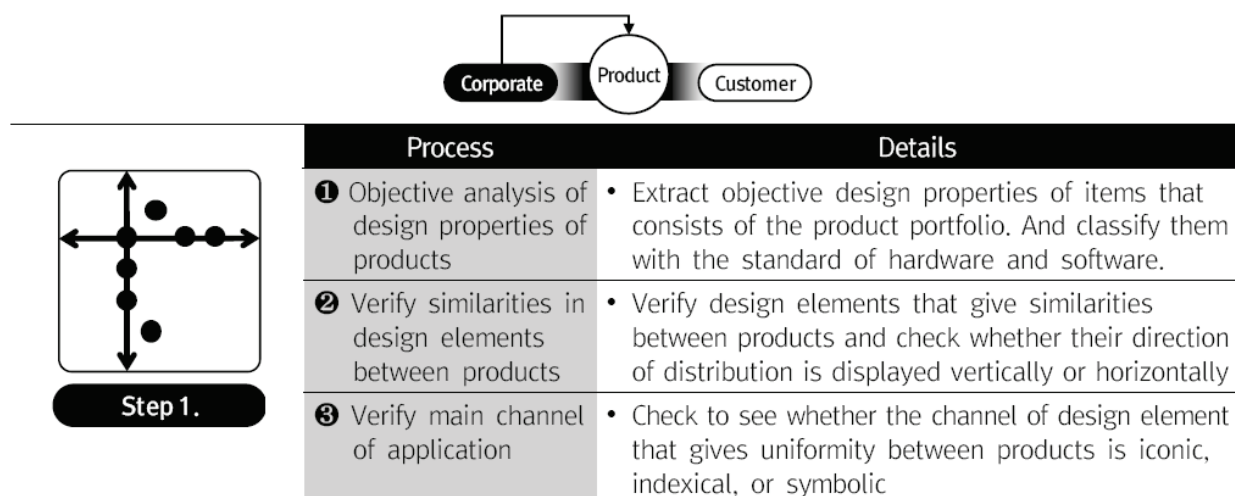
3.1. STEP1. ANALYZING ENCODING CONTEXT

The content addressed in the framework of the first analysis is the problem of sender of communications model, in other words, 'encoding' a design identity from the position of the developer. This is in fact the same as the problem of through what method the design product and its message will be connected. In other words, it is the problem of through what method the design and its value key words can be connected with the design as a visible substance. Such flow can be considered a problem of the encoding context, or the process of giving significance to design elements and completing it as symbols which are products of the design.

When Pierce's model is used as the standard an important factor in relation to symbolic context is the method in which an object and its interpretant are joined. This in fact, is to understand the pattern of formation of representation. Thus, the framework of this analysis is to study the pattern of forming design images by connecting design substance with values. Channels in which a corporation displays its product design value as an object can be classified into the following three patterns.

categories		iconic channel	indexical channel	symbolic channel
properties				
1	notion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symbols and meanings are joined based on the characteristic patterns of the object with specific visual properties that represent the object exist itself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joined based on causal relationship between symbols and meanings. Meanings – patterns of symbols are joined through suggestions or commands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similarity or causal relationship between symbols and meanings are insignificant. The two elements are joined through force or agreement
2	principles of join	similarity proximity	indication hint	social agreement custom
3	process for comprehension	perception recognition	observation thinking	learning repetition
4	points of the strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of shape and style that is characteristic of the product 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of characteristic method that suggest own company design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of work code that represent philosophical value of design
5	checklist for confirmation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the applicable corporation and its brand-like images are expressed by what have the most characteristic images that best represent that product? • Are majority of products that form product portfolio expressed through images that are identical or similar? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are familiar marks, functions, or principles of use that display brand-likeness of the applicable company added to the product? • Are trademark-like elements that express the design-likeness shared among items that form the product portfolio? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does brand-likeness have no direct connection with substantial uniformity and is it revealed indirectly through internal elements? • Is it displayed internally through philosophical significance and motto of products that form the product portfolio?

[fig] 3 types of encoding context according to the channels of semiotic product



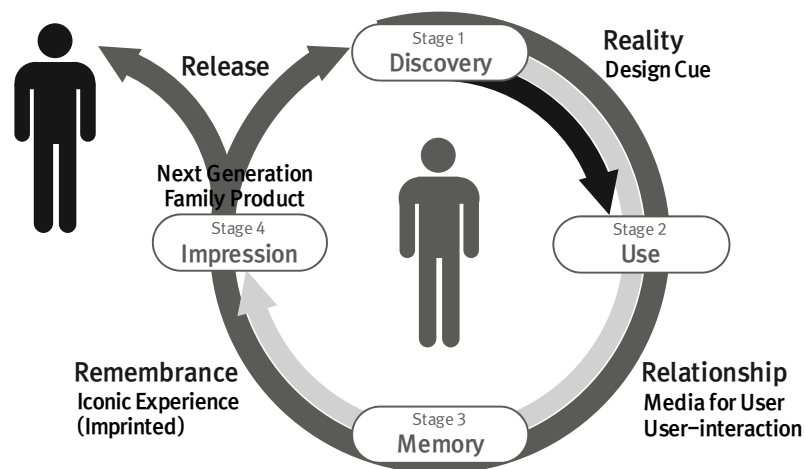
[fig] process for confirming 'Encoding Context'

3.2. STEP2. ANALYZING DECODING CONTEXT

The second analysis framework is the problem of 'decoding' the design identity as codes as to receivers, or users and it is an analysis of the process in which design images are formed through user interpretations of design elements.

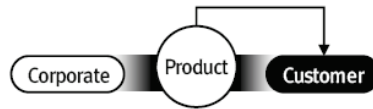
Once developed, product forms induce various psychological reactions from the users. Here, the patten of design images that are materialized to users can be said to have patterns and correlation intended by design identity of the product. As a result, these patterns can be handled with importance. And thus, the problem of what representation about the product and type of experience the user forms to accept the design message, in other words, decoding context, can be understood.

The process in which the user forms a characteristic image about the applicable product is can be considered the process in which the design identity is interpreted by the user and the design image is recognized by the user. A corporate identity can be considered strategically established and delivered only if it leaves a positive image for users and leads to re-purchase.



[fig] processing of user experience through product image creation

Bitner (1992) suggested that such psychological reactions are structured by two types of responses, cognitive response and affective response. There is a possibility that cognitive response is towards useware properties of products and affective response is toward feelware properties of products. This framework of analysis intends to add the category of user knowledge and conceptual response, taking into consideration cultureware which is a property of product design.



	Process	Details
	① Categorize product design elements by 3 properties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Categorize product design elements that were objectively analyzed in step 1 by classifying them into properties of aesthetic, cognitive, and conceptual aspects.
	② Check user reaction by design property levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check to see whether design images for each design element for each level are formed by the user – through questionnaire of answers from each property of each design element presented.
	③ Check order of importance of reaction pattern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand to which level of design image the design elements that give consistency between products that were found in step 1. Then rank the three categories in the order of importance.

[fig] Analyzing Decoding Context

3.3. STEP3. ANALYZING CODE CONTEXT

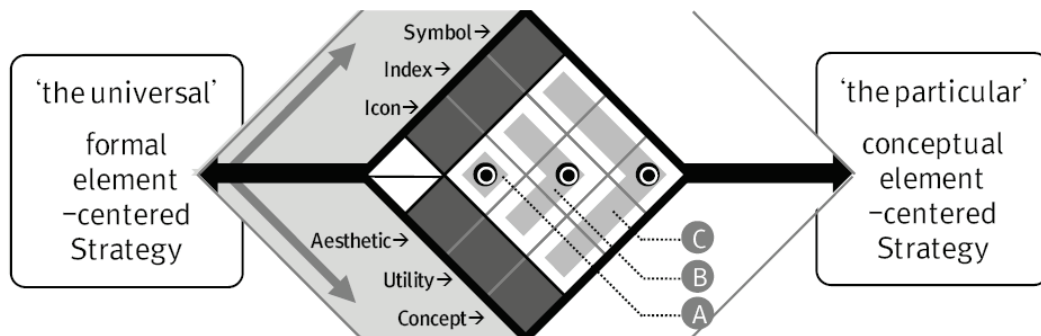
Last step is the third analysis process that integrates the first step, symbolizing patterns by the developer, and the second step, interpretation of codes by users. This is ultimately understanding the properties of patterns rather than mere codes, and can be said to be related to code context. There were 3 categories of encoding context like iconic, indexical and symbolic channel at the step 1. And similarly, 3 classes exist according to aesthetic, utility and concept level at the step 2. The important issue to focus on is the co-relation between these two categorizing standards.

encoding channel		levels of user's design image (code category)		
		Aesthetic level (aesthetic code)	Utility level (logical code)	Concept level (social code)
1	iconic channel	●		
2	indexical channel		●	
3	symbolic channel			●

* Resource from 'Product Semiotics, 조영식, Communication Books, 2006.06.30. 44p.'

[fig] co-relation between encoding channels and code categories

In other words, as coding channel approaches symbolic from iconic, the user requires more knowledge in the interpretation process of the message. In addition, as code interpretation approaches conceptual from aesthetic, more user knowledge is applied. If expression of design identity is based more on knowledge and conceptual awareness rather than on intuitive or emotional perception, then rather than relying on figurative uniformity it can unfold in more diverse directions.



[fig] understanding the opposite direction between 'the universal' and 'the particular'

Therefore, when the above relationship is integrated, a matrix such as the above figure can be constructed. First, 9 cases are deduced by integrating the 3 patters from step 1 and step 2. Then, a categorization can be made using the 3 conditions that were classified based 'the universal properties' and 'the particular properties'. These can be inferred to 3 patterns of 'Typify', 'Imbody' and 'Diversify'

Categories		Typify	Imbody	Diversify
Properties				
1	Notion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product portfolio is structured by having majority of products share typical styles or representative images or by having product types have more common elements than particular characteristics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product portfolio is structured with products that are diverse yet have characteristic indicators shared by product groups or product groups that have trademark-like elements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product portfolio is structured with product groups that share the way design is applied in products or those that share philosophical significance rather than common principles in their design elements.
2	Cognitive Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The universal-centered strategy Through intuitive perception 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited universal -centered strategy Through use or cognitive process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The particular-oriented strategy Through knowledge or cognitive concept
3	explicit-implicit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> denotative feature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> denotative and conotative feature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> conotative feature

[fig] 3 categories of expressing design identity

It is able to say that these categories have something to do with the premise on 'the universal' and 'the particular'. Compared to Aaker's 'Brand identity system', 'the universal' corresponds to 'core identity' and 'the particular' to 'extended identity'. If universal properties are strong, strong patterns can be displayed through similarities between product groups. In contrast, if particular properties are strong, a flexible identity can be expressed through various series of product groups. This can be inferred as the most representative direction for the user's reminding the characteristic image of the product identity. This categorization is the essence in the step 3.

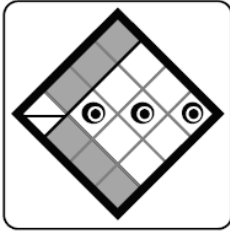
Then, the issue should be inspected concerning another premise of 'identity', so to speak the 'diachronic dimension' and the 'synchronic dimension'. If it is focused from the design identity's viewpoint, it can be classified into management patterns focusing the product line-up(segmentation) and product item(segmentation). This can be understood through design characteristics of product portfolio that were structured previously. Product line up-based management is the case in which major design properties are mainly distributed vertically, according to the consistency of time. And product item-based management is the case in which they are distributed horizontally, by the common denominator among the different product line-ups. The former prioritizes the consistency of design identity through the passage of time and the latter prioritizes consistency of various products that are released in the same time.

If two standards are integrated to categorize expressive conditions of design identity, 6 basic patterns can be deduced as follows. So to speak, these are resulted from the categories of 'Typify', 'Embody' and 'Diversify' inspected from the viewpoints of 'product line-up' and 'product item'. In this step, to which of these the expression conditions of the applicable design identity belong are deduced.

		Categories		
Management		Typify	Imbody	Diversify
1	Product Line-up oriented	A Progressive Factor	B Successive Factor	C Advanced Factor
2	Product Item oriented	D Convergent Factor	E Crossover Factor	F Individual Factor

[fig] 6 patterns of expressing design identity



	Process	Details
 <p>Step 3.</p>	1 Synthesis of design element discoveries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fill in a single table all applicable discoveries with iconic, indexical, and symbolic of developers (step1) and aesthetic, cognitive, and conceptual response level of user (step2) on each side of the table.
	2 Categorization by the standard, universal-particular	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Among 3 categories of A, B and C (Typify – Implant – Diversify), find the applicable one with the highest number of distribution of design properties and understand what pattern they are
	3 Categorization by diachronic-synchronic standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand to which axis, vertical or horizontal, the central position that appeared on 3 of step1 belongs and deduce pattern to which the applicable design identity belongs.

[fig] Analyzing Code Context

4. CASE ANALYSIS

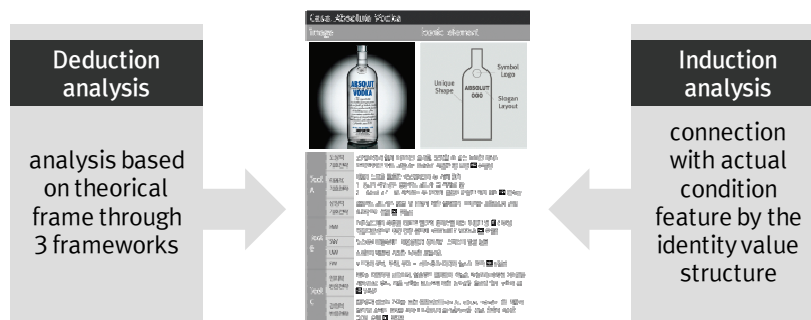
4.1. STANDARDS OF CASE SELECTION

Based on the study on the said research models, a hypothesis could be established that there are expressive elements that can reveal the characteristics of design identity in products and they exist in a form of genetic concept that expresses and inherits design characteristics. Such concept is identified as 'iconic element' in this study.

The iconic element clearly reveals the distinctive aspects of products superficially so that it can be seen as a design cue that enables the user to recognize the corresponding products immediately. Besides, it helps maintain the individuality and characteristics of products profoundly; in the meantime, it becomes a tool that forms cumulative identity based on the long-term relationship with the user. In addition, it is one of the design elements that integrate user experiences into products so that the products in question become the representation of user groups. In this regard, the selection of cases for the analysis subject becomes the standard of whether there is an iconic element and especially it focuses on the products with iconic signals that have concrete visual characteristics.

4.2. METHODS AND PROCESS

In this stage, the degree of conformity between phenomena found in various strategies and cases is reviewed through the three aforementioned frameworks. Through this process, this study analyzed the subjects to be investigated of research model such as signal endowment context, signal context and signal interpretation context in the context of corresponding cases. In addition, it confirmed the direction of strategies that have not been deduced yet, by inducing additionally found phenomena through cases. Furthermore, it enables one to check the possibility of expanding the said research model.



[fig 24] Methods of Case Analysis

4.3. DETAILS OF CASE ANALYSIS





Black Purple
Rose pattern

This block features a collection of black and purple perfume bottles and accessories, including a large bottle with a decorative stopper, a smaller bottle, a lipstick tube, and a black perfume cap. To the right, a line-art diagram of a rose is shown on a light gray background.



Monogram
Canvas

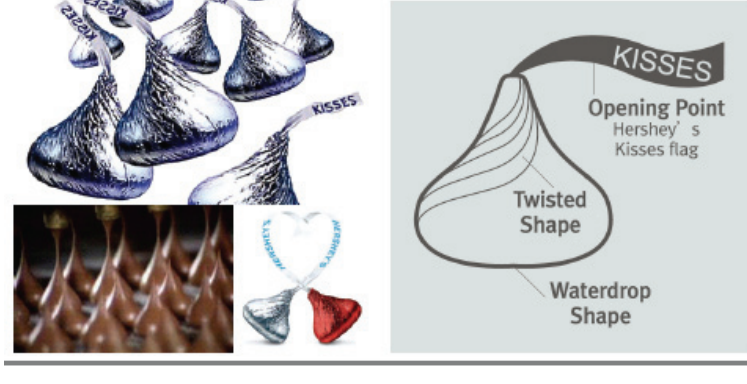
This block shows two Louis Vuitton handbags: one in the classic brown monogram canvas and another in a multi-colored monogram canvas. To the right, a diagram displays the 'LV' monogram and four variations of the four-pointed star logo (the 'Monogram Canvas' symbols) in different colors and orientations.



Golden
Penpoint

Montblanc Star
Mountaintop
with Snow

This block displays a fountain pen nib, a gold ring, and several Montblanc pens. To the right, a diagram shows a six-pointed star logo and a fountain pen nib. The star logo is labeled 'Montblanc Star Mountaintop with Snow', and the nib is labeled 'Golden Penpoint'.



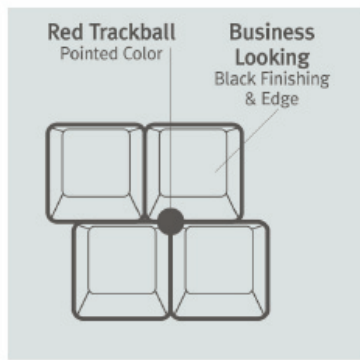
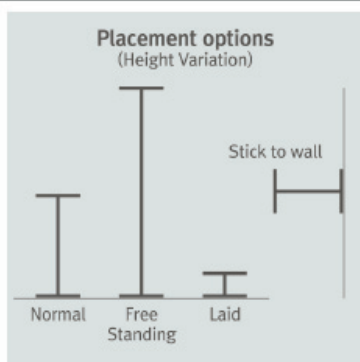
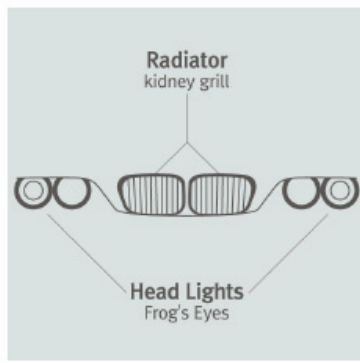
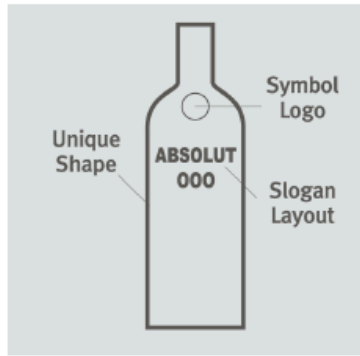
KISSES

Opening Point
Hershey's
Kisses flag

Twisted
Shape

Waterdrop
Shape

This block shows several Hershey's Kisses chocolates, some in their silver foil wrappers and some unwrapped. To the right, a diagram illustrates the shape of a Kiss, with labels for 'KISSES' (on the wrapper), 'Opening Point Hershey's Kisses flag' (at the top), 'Twisted Shape' (the main body), and 'Waterdrop Shape' (the bottom curve).





4.4. SYNTHESIS OF CASE ANALYSIS

As in the previously established hypothesis, the process of embodying core identity through product design elements has the following traits compared to other elements. First, it has been noted that it has the aspects of being noticed relatively more or for a longer time. Second, that products are contained in the formative elements has unique formativeness in some cases for simply providing the differentiation from other companies and there are cases of appealing to people through the sensitivity for usability or formativeness by forming inevitable association between messages and formative elements contained in them. Third, various identity aspects by

sharing new sentiment and reaching culture creation are revealed through design elements from the context contained in formativeness and storytelling.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the suggested framework and its subsequent case experience, this study can conduct a research on the process of establishing strong identity based on design elements. It has been noted that the design elements defined through the establishment of a hypothesis - concept of design cue - has become a connection ring between the stages within the process of forming identity as it has been advanced to the level of product element- product use - usage culture. It is primarily composed of sensibility such as intuitional intimacy, cheerfulness, humor and wit through simplicity and it enables one to have superiority in products as design innovation factors by escaping from the stereotypes; furthermore, it is applied flexibly to various periodic circumstances while maintaining its original form. This suggests that it is an important direction in the formation of strong identity to establish icons as dominant and representative images in the establishment of brand for each company.

In terms of the limitations of this study, it was possible to figure out the process of establishing identity from design elements, but it was not possible to classify design elements clearly and analytically. Namely, the understanding of an insight and priority for gestalt design should be done in advance to microscopically analyze such individual elements. It is not possible to achieve the goal of establishing identity by underlining specific elements in each of design elements, but it is necessary to consider general relationship between elements in order to do so.

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