

Branding through visual design: A case study of a company's visual identity guided by brand values and story

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is a study on how a company can use visual design in branding. A company's visual identity has previously been studied mostly through corporate identity and from the perspective of designing individual identity elements. Visual design in all of its applications including products, environments and information has received less attention. The objective was to investigate what kind of considerations building and managing a visual identity requires and in which parts of branding visual design can play a role. Evaluating the effectiveness of the chosen approach to visual design was left outside the scope.

The topic was studied through a literature review and case study. The Finnish distillery Kyrö Distillery Company was selected as the case company because of its active branding efforts and broad use of visual material. The case study was divided into visual research and interview with the company's marketing manager. The objective of the visual research was to gain an initial understanding of the case company's visual identity. The interview was conducted to shed light on the decision-making and challenges behind the visual identity. Since the study was a single case study of a company in the distinctive alcohol industry there are limitations to applying the findings to all businesses.

In branding visual design can be used to differentiate products, create brand awareness and justify a premium price. The case study findings suggest that companies can approach creating a visual identity through their brand values and story. Companies should consider how different visual identity elements relate to each other as well as to the other senses. One of the biggest challenges is maintaining a coherent and consistent visual identity when collaborating with various other parties. Companies can benefit from clear instructions, a design manual and especially from centralizing visual design to one trusted design agency.

This thesis provides a starting point for companies planning to create or redesign their visual identity as it highlights some of the main considerations and challenges when managing visual design. Visual design can be a powerful tool in branding and an alternative to traditional advertising.

Avainsanat visual identity, visual design, branding, design management, case study, Kyrö Distillery Company

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1

INTRODUCTION

One year as a birthday present my friend took me for a drink to a peculiar pop-up bar called Kyrönmaan Matkailun Edistämiskeskus (Kyrö's Tourism Agency). It was definitely not a regular place to go for a drink. To our surprise there was a launch party on that particular evening. A woman and a man in 1940s-style clothing were performing in midst of all the guests crammed inside the tiny space. The intimacy was emphasized by their raw performances: the man played an acoustic guitar while the woman sang into a megaphone. The drink list was like a brochure for Kyrönmaa – a subregion of Ostrobothnia in Western Finland – with stories as drink descriptions. With live music, a delicious drink and bartenders in rugged aprons I was astounded by the atmosphere. It was definitely like a precious secret you only tell your best friends. Only later, remembering the beautiful package design of the launched beverage, I connected the dots: it had been the launch party of Kyrö Distillery Company's unaged rye spirit Juuri.

My background and interests guided me to choose branding and visual design as the topic of the thesis. Well-designed experiences and visually pleasing objects and surroundings like that of the Kyrö Distillery pop-up bar tend to peak my interest. Learning about creating strong and distinctive brands has been my main motive for studying marketing electives. As a textile design student I have had the opportunity to create miniature versions of brands through sample collections of knitted, woven and print

fabrics: design work starts with a statement or story that is communicated throughout the collection. In my bachelor thesis, I wanted to broaden the scope from yarns to businesses.

The objective of this thesis was to research the practices of using the visual identity of a company in branding. Although visual design is only one part of a branding it is the most visible to consumers. It raised the question about what a company should consider when creating and managing visual identity and what kind of role it could play in branding. Quantitative analysis such as measuring brand value or the competitive advantage gained through the visual identity was left outside the scope of this thesis. The topic was studied through a literature review as well as a case study.

Conducting a case study enabled getting a holistic idea of how one company uses visual design. As I was already familiar with Kyrö Distillery Company and had read about its success with both products and branding, the company posed an excellent case for the thesis. I was interested to discover whether the company was branding itself as consciously as appeared in newspaper articles. By choosing a young but successful Finnish company I hoped to derive insights that had the potential of being applied to any company regardless of its size.

1.1 Motivation behind the topic

Visual identity is a concrete manifestation of the corporate and brand identity which makes it a relevant topic within the design and branding domain. Visual design could be a useful tool when building a brand that can engage consumers. However, there is little literature covering visual identity from a holistic perspective including a multitude of applications in the context of a business. Therefore, studying the use of visual design in branding can offer new ideas for companies already applying or planning to apply it in their day-to-day functions.

1.1.1 Discovering new opportunities in branding

Within highly saturated markets where new products and services are being launched on a regular basis it has become increasingly difficult to catch the attention of consumers and eventually to keep it. However, branding can be a meaningful asset in a company as brands can help to differentiate one product from another and influence consumer behavior (Kotler & Keller & Brady & Goodman & Hansen, 2016, p. 447). Products and services with strong and coherent brand identities are easier to recall and get attached to (Aaker 1996, p. 201-205). Furthermore, over the long term branding can provide extension options for the business. Values that are not tied to product attributes open up possibilities for new products and services. Strong brands can also shield against copying since intangible benefits and brand associations are very difficult to replicate. (Aaker 1996, p. 201-205) From a broader perspective, when companies are being sold, the intangible assets and goodwill created by the brand can increase the acquisition price to a large degree (Kotler et al., 2016, 448).

The power of branding has been recognized by companies with the world's most valuable brands ("The World's Most Valuable Brands", 2017). Most of them manage distinctive visual identities that are recognized by people all over the world. Apple is known for its sleek and minimalistic iPhones

and Macbooks whereas McDonald's for its yellow and red, the big arches of the M and the clown Ronald McDonald. What is characteristic of these companies is that they communicate their brand values through a visual identity that is coherent across all channels ranging from products to websites and interiors.

In Finland, where competing on price can be challenging, there is a need for companies to discover new ways for standing out in the market. Finland has for a long time been known for its industry and less for consumer products with Nokia the biggest success so far. Traditionally the lack of successful consumer products is compared with our neighbor Sweden who has created a multitude of internationally known brands. Thus, Finland is yet to discover its success stories in branding. Although there is a lot more to a successful product or service than a strong brand it is an essential asset in business (Kapferer, 2004, p. 10-11). Therefore, skills in brand management are highly called for when developing consumer products. Visual identity is a tangible realization of the brand and can thus be an integral means of communication for a company.

1.1.2 Widening the scope of visual design

Visual identity and design have been discussed extensively under several domains including brand management, corporate identity as well as design management. Baker and Balmer (1997) have studied how corporate visual identity can be utilized in the repositioning of an organization and Melewar and Saunders (1999) have investigated the influences on the international standardization of corporate visual identity. There are some studies that focus on the organizational measures and characteristics that influence a consistent corporate visual identity (Van den Bosch, de Jong and Elving, 2003; 2006). Additionally, Olins (1989) has written about how design can be used to make business strategy visible. Although these account discuss relevant issues related to visual identity, they are

restricted to name, slogan, logo, typography and colors of the corporate visual identity.

”There is less research that would consider a company’s entire visual identity, including both the corporation and its brands.”

Apart from the perspective of the corporation, the focus in literature has mostly been on one specific aspect of the brand identity at a time such as product design (Karjalainen & Snelders, 2010), retail branding (Stone, 2007) or eco-labels (Lihhavtsuk, 2015). However, there is less research that would consider a company’s entire visual identity, including both the corporation and its brands. Schmitt and Simonson (1997) acknowledged the potential of aesthetics more broadly through all senses, yet contemporary research on the topic is scarce. Therefore, this thesis will cover visual design in all of its applications to products, communication, environments and behavior.

1.2 Case company background

Kyrö Distillery Company is a Finnish all-rye distillery that produces gin and whiskey. The company was established in 2012 and now exports to 28 countries (M. Koskinen, personal communication, February 20, 2017) and has a turnover of 1,2 million (Simola, 2016). For a small Finnish firm it has been very successful. The name of the company surfaced within the general Finnish public after the Kyrö Distillery Company gin Napue won the gin & tonic category in the International Wine and Spirit Competition in 2015 (Pere, 2015) (see Figure 1). Kyrö Distillery Company has also been recognized for the package design of their products (Moster, 2015). From the very beginning branding has been an integral part of the company which will be discussed more closely under the case selection criteria.

The story of the company dates back to 2012 when a group of friends was sipping whiskey at a sauna evening. They began to wonder why there is no all-rye distillery in a country where rye is such an integral part of everyday life. After a year the

founders settled on the main brand values that were created to work like a compass: they would guide the way of working, the decision-making about collaborating partners and new hires, the visual identity as well as the creation of the company culture. (Pankakoski & Koskinen, 2016)

The clear set of brand values and their importance in managing the company are clearly visible in the company's actions. What is characteristic of Kyrö is that instead of simply producing gin and trying to sell it off liquor store shelves, the company actively develops its business and brand. In addition to producing gin and whiskey Kyrö Distillery Company manages a restaurant, arranges distillery visits ("Distillery", 2017) and has even hosted a food and drink festival named after their gin ("Napuefest", 2017).



Figure 1. In 2015 Kyrö Distillery Company's Napue won the award for the best gin for gin and tonic in the International Wine & Spirit Competition.

1.3 Alcohol industry in Finland

The case company acts in a very distinctive and highly regulated industry in Finland. The alcohol legislation restricts the consumption, sales, distribution and advertising of alcoholic products, which cause a multitude of challenges for companies operating in the liquor industry. In Finland, grocery stores and kiosks can sell beverages with a maximum of 4,7 % of alcohol. The state-owned Alko has a monopoly for the rest of the alcohol products. (“Markkinakatsaus”, 2017) Despite the strict regulations, the Finnish alcohol industry has been very vibrant recently.

1.3.1 Restrictions on advertising

Advertising alcoholic beverages is highly regulated in Finland. Beverages with less than 22 % of alcohol can be advertised limitedly. Generally speaking, the sales promotion of beverages with over 22 % of alcohol is forbidden including direct and indirect advertising. Producers cannot provide commercial information to consumers such as promotional messages or prices. Moreover, the online price catalogues of sales locations (Alko liquor stores) can be informative but not include any promotional language. However, there are a few exceptions. Advertising alcohol in restaurants and bars is allowed as long as it is appropriate and discreet. A private person or journalist can write about products if he or she does not profit from advertising strong alcoholic beverages. These publications include news, blog posts and other stories in the media. In addition, advertising the corporate image is allowed when it focuses on the company’s operating principles, objectives and the quality of their products. (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden tutkimuskeskus, 2014)

“It is difficult to brand something that cannot be promoted or written about freely. ”

Particularly the regulations on advertising alcohol in Finland affect branding approaches of companies like Kyrö Distillery Company that sell strong alcoholic beverages. It is difficult to brand something that cannot be promoted or written about freely. However, companies can work around the challenges by, for instance, focusing on corporate branding or relying on the media to write stories about the success in spirits competitions. (Mac Dougall, 2016) Additionally, companies can provide product information on foreign servers if they can prove that they export to other markets (Lukkari, 2015). For instance, Kyrö Distillery Company hosts its website in Estonia (Mac Dougall, 2016).

1.3.2 A booming industry

The Finnish alcohol industry is undergoing interesting times. Alcohol was the biggest export in the food and drink industry in 2016 with a share of just below 10 % (Elintarviketeollisuusliitto, 2017). The boom in the alcohol industry has materialized into new products and actors within both beers and hard liquors such as whiskey and gin. There are also several festivals being held yearly around the field such as Helsinki Beer Festival, UISGE (Helsinki whiskey festival) and Suuret Oluet – Pienet Panimot (a microbrewery festival).

Beer has been trendy for several years now: beer and beer tasting have become fairly common hobbies and the amount of microbreweries keeps growing. The reasons behind the boom lie in international enthusiasm which has spread via food-related TV shows and travelling as well as the trendiness of consuming local food (Holopainen, 2017). In the beginning of 2017, there were 82 microbreweries in Finland (Ojala, 2017). However, the bigger actors still own most of the market share: microbreweries produce only 3 % of the yearly 400 million liters of beer being sold (Holopainen, 2017). Although the core concept of many microbreweries is introducing innovative new beers, product launches haven’t been limited to small companies. For instance,

Olvi has been successful with its IPA and APA beers (Niiranen, 2016) and Laitilan Wirvoitusjuomatehdas is attempting to conquer the United States with its gluten free beer Kukko (Piitulainen, 2016).

The Finnish spirits market has received a fair amount of attention in the media as well. Companies like Kyrö Distillery Company and The Helsinki Distilling Company have been successful in international spirit competitions recently (Pere, 2015; “The Helsinki Distilling Company”, 2017). Finnish companies are also tapping into the whiskey trend experienced all around the world. Several distilleries are starting to produce whiskey with the intention to also export it. As a result, in three to four years the production of Finnish whiskey might grow extensively. However, the strict alcohol legislation and license policies might affect expansion. (Lukkari, 2015)

1.4 Research problem

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how companies can use visual design in branding. Visual design in all of its applications in a company and its brand hasn't been studied extensively. Conducting a single case study proposes the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of how one company has approached the creation and management of visual identity. Combining the case study with a literature review about branding and visual identity provides the opportunity to derive new insights into the use of visual design in a company.

The research question is defined as:

”How can a company use visual design in branding?”

The topic is researched through three supporting questions:

- 1) How can a company approach the creation of visual identity?**
- 2) What should a company consider when managing visual design?**
- 3) In which parts of branding can visual design play a role?**

2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since visual design is looked at through the lens of a company and its branding activities in this thesis, the literature review covers branding and design. A brief introduction into brand management creates the baseline for the discussion and strives to clarify the role of visual design in branding. A large part of the contemporary literature studying the visual identity of a company focuses on the corporate visual identity (CVI). Brand identities and their visual designs have been covered through mostly product design. Although in this thesis the term visual identity refers to the multitude of applications in a company, corporate identity and product visual design literature are included in the literature review. A combination literature provides the opportunity to make connections between topics within a very multidisciplinary field.

2.1 Strategic brand management

Brands are the result of the chosen segmentation and positioning of a company's offering. Companies create combinations of both tangible and intangible attributes that they want to communicate to their customers. (Kapferer, 2004, p. 33) Strategic brand management is a conscious effort to offer a product or service with an identity and to communicate it on all levels. Additionally, it means encouraging people to see the brand similarly to what the company intended. (Kotler et al., 2016, p. 428-429) To establish a strong brand, its identity should be consistent throughout the company and visible in everything it does. All the different marketing mix elements, product, place, price, promotion, physical evidence, process and people should be taken into consideration (Kotler, 2016, p. 432). At its best brands generate intangible added value that can make a positive difference when consumers are weighing two similar offerings. (Kotler et al., 2016, p. 426) Visual identity is tightly intertwined with branding as it is a means of materializing intangible values and reflecting strategic ideas behind the brand.

2.1.1 Core concepts

The concepts brand identity, brand image and brand equity are used to describe different actions and characteristics of branding. Brand identity is the idea of an offering that the company aims to portray for consumers. It is distinguished from brand image which describes the customer's perception of what a brand stands for. Although the brand identity can be built and managed by the company, there is always a possibility that it is not understood exactly as intended. (Kotler et al., 2016, p. 426) Brand equity is the added financial value the brand gives a product or service. Brand equity is established through the unique associations linked to the offering and perceived by consumers. (Kapferer, 2004, p. 10)

2.1.2 Creating and managing a brand

Brands create value on two levels, intangible and tangible, which are both integral to creating and managing them. Most brands start by introducing an innovative product or service: in the beginning the company is simply a name. Over time, intangible values and associations are more tightly linked to the name which eventually becomes a brand that can influence buyers. Conversely, some brands start as a concept, selling a meaning and symbolic status. Over time, this approach requires companies to consider what types of products or services the intangible values should be embodied in. (Kapferer, 2004, p. 61-62)

The purpose of a brand is to distinguish a product from another and to certify its origin (Kapferer, 2004, p. 293). The creation of a brand can be approached through the brand vision. The objective of a brand vision is to deliver a consistent message about the brand and its core values (Kotler et al., 2016, p. 428-429). Brand equity is highly based on the associations customers generate with the brand (Aaker, 1996, p. 25). The brand value pyramid (Davis, 2000, p. 55) is one way of planning and determining brand associations based on the brand identity. It is divided into three parts with features and attributes at the bottom, benefits in the middle and beliefs and values on the top (See Figure 2). The higher up the associations are in the pyramid, the more difficult they are to copy but also to create. A brand persona, human characteristics associated with the brand, supports the brand values and helps to visualize them. It also helps customers connect with the brand and thus generate brand equity. (Davis, 2000) Over time brand management also includes considerations about product and brand relationships – brand architecture – if more than one product is produced (Kapferer, 2004, p. 293).

However, a random set of associations combined with a brand persona do not necessarily provide the intended brand message. To communicate the essence of the brand, identity elements should be balanced and positioned to create a meaningful and cohesive big picture. Consistent associations that are logically linked support the brand identity. (Aaker, 1996, p. 92-95) Integrated marketing communications is a way of communicating the brand's positioning in a consistent way across channels based on the brand strategy. There are several different communication vehicles including advertising, public relations, event marketing and sponsorships, trade, sales and consumer promotions, direct marketing and internal employee communications. (Davis, 2000) Communication often includes both visual and verbal elements which can be executed in-house or outsourced to a branding or advertising agency.

Visual identity plays a role in both the creation of brand identity and communicating it to customers. Hence, it is a tangible realization of the brand vision. In the brand value pyramid, visual design falls onto the bottom of the triangle as it defines how a product, service or environment appears. However, it is existent in the other levels of the

pyramid by reflecting them visually. Although traditional branding literature does not cover visual identity abundantly, it is clearly a valuable asset in many aspects of branding.

2.1.3 Creating value through aesthetics

Aesthetics can create value for an organization on multiple levels. It can be a means to differentiate a brand or for example make a product pop up on the retail store shelf. A strong visual identity is also easier to recall because it reflects and symbolizes the company in a distinctive manner. Hence, aesthetics can support brand recognition and the affection felt towards visually pleasing and intriguing products or services can enhance customer loyalty. Moreover, the aesthetics of the product, service or brand create brand equity and thus might allow for premium pricing. Visual identity can also provide protection from competitive attacks: a carefully curated combination of visual elements is more difficult to imitate. Finally, a visual system managed through clear guidelines saves time because different stakeholders can take advantage of the readily available material in manuals or templates. (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997)

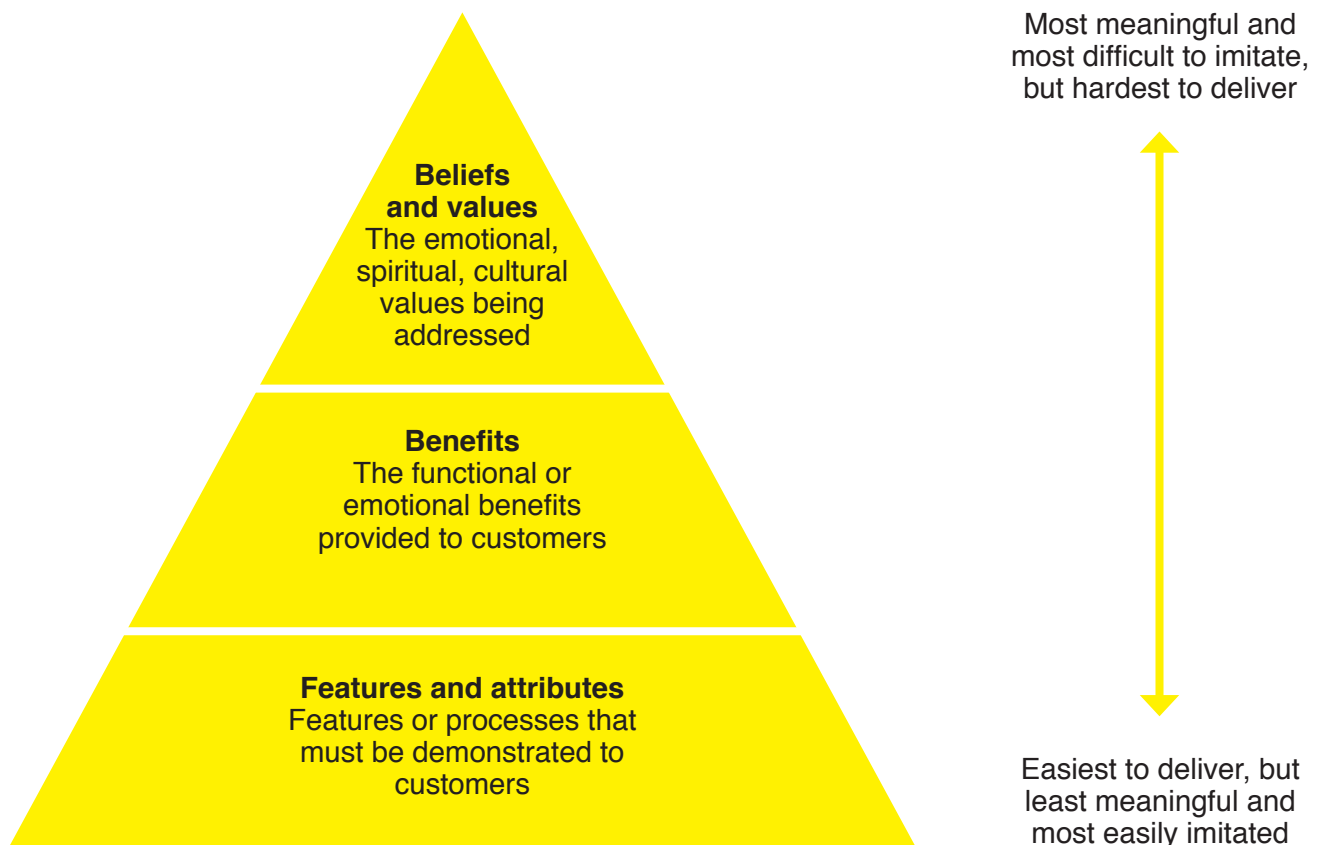


Figure 2. The brand value pyramid. Adapted from *Brand Asset Management: Driving profitable growth through your brands.* (p. 55), S. M. Davis, 2000, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc. Copyright 2000 by the Jossey-Bass Inc. Adapted with permission.

2.2 Visual identity in a company

The creation of a company's visual identity is rooted into the core of the company and its brands. First, the company should decide where it aims with the visual identity. Thereafter, the considerations range from the creation of an identity structure to the management of a single element and its associations. Since visual identity is related to a variety of domains, it also cuts across departments (Olins, 1989, p. 191). Therefore, the creation and management of visual identity will include professionals from several departments such as marketing and brand management, design, communications and even strategy. Additionally, especially concrete visual design tasks might be outsourced to branding or design agencies.

2.2.1 Definition of visual identity

The definition of visual identity can be slightly confusing since it is used in a number of different contexts. As discussed in the introduction the concept of visual identity is often connected to either individual designs such as product or retail environment or discussed in the context of corporate identity excluding a company's brands. According to Van den Bosch, de Jong and Elving (2005) "a corporate visual identity (CVI) consists of a name, a symbol and/or logo, typography, colour, a slogan and – very often – additional graphical elements". Corporate visual identity has also been defined more broadly as "the visual presentation of a corporate identity" which emphasizes its numerous possible applications to different stakeholders (Van den Bosch, 2005).

"In my thesis visual identity is defined as the visual presentation of both the private and public self of an organization."

However, the identity of an organization can be divided into the private self and the public self. The private self involves the corporate identity and public self the company's brands and their identities. According to Schmitt and Simonson (1997) both areas are concerned with visual identity and should be managed in relation to each other. The authors also coined the term marketing aesthetics which refers to "the marketing of sensory experiences in corporate or brand output that contributes to the organization's or brand's identity" (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997, p. 18). They specifically include both the private and public self of the company as channels for aesthetics because both are integral to the visual identity. However, the definition of marketing aesthetics includes all senses while this thesis focuses on one sense only: vision.

In my thesis visual identity is defined as the visual presentation of both the private and public self of an organization. It encompasses all the material that is used to communicate about the company and its brands including individual elements such as logo, typeface and colors as well as more multifaceted applications such as product packaging, company premises or stores, websites, photos, videos and pictures on social and traditional media.

2.2.2 Managing visual identity on multiple levels

There are different levels to managing visual identity in a company, each of which have their separate focus points. Van den Bosch, de Jong and Elving (2003) have created a framework for the research domain of corporate visual identity by dividing it into three levels: strategic, operational and design. However, the framework can also be viewed from a management perspective since different research areas resemble required actions within visual identity management (See Figure 3). The strategic level concentrates on the more general guidelines and objectives that guide decision-making behind the visual identity. These

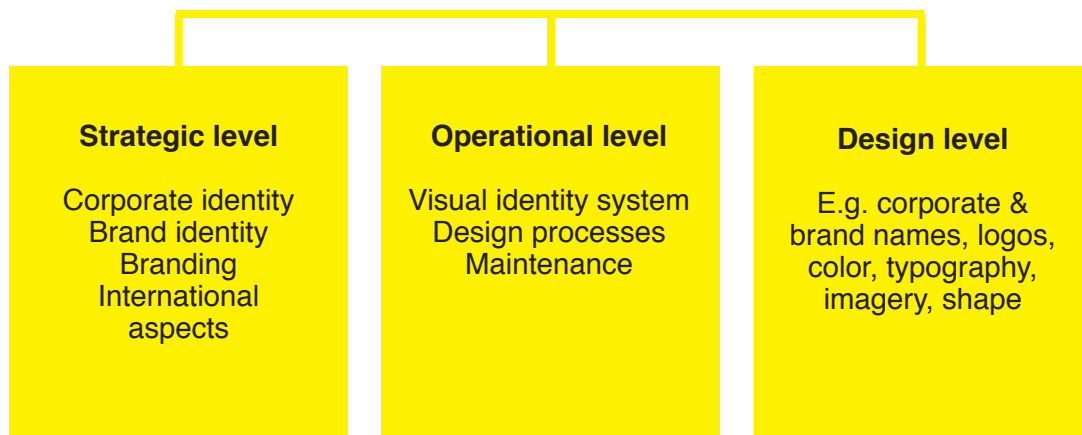


Figure 3. Levels of visual identity management. Adapted from *Managing corporate visual identity: Use and effects of organizational measures to support a consistent self-presentation*. A. L. M. van den Bosch, M. D. T. de Jong, W. J. L. Elving, 2004, *Public Relations Review*, 30(2), p. 225. Copyright 2004 by the Elsevier Inc. Adapted with permission.

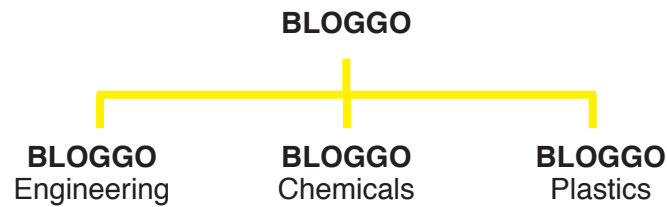
include considerations such as identity structure and standardization versus localization of visual identity in international markets. The operational level focuses on the concrete visual identity system: it is concerned with developing and maintaining a consistent corporate visual identity and managing design processes. From the research point of view, the design level concentrates on the effectiveness and functionality of the different elements of the visual identity (Van den Bosch, de Jong & Elving, 2003). For management this could mean guiding the design of individual identity elements or their applications either in an internal design team or in an external design firm.

2.2.3 Creating a visual identity structure

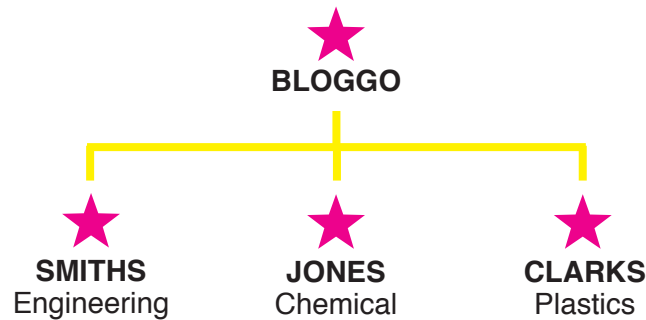
According to Olins (1989, p. 78) corporate identity is not only about logos, colors and typography but it can visualize how a company does business and how work is organized. Therefore, some of the first decisions on visual identity are concerned with how visual references are positioned within the company and its brands. Olins has identified three ways of structuring corporate visual identity: monolithic, endorsed and branded (see Figure 4). Monolithic identities are based on one name and visual style that run throughout the company. Companies in this category have often grown fairly organically and are known for quality. Although one message can be clearer, monolithic identities require great attention to product or service quality and coherence to keep a strong image. An organization with an endorsed identity has several activities which are presented simultaneously individually and as part of the head corporation.

These organizations are often the result of several acquisitions of competitors, suppliers and customers. The challenge of endorsed identity lies in balancing the idea of a single organization with a sense of purpose with the separate identities run by it. Lastly, in a branded identity the parent company is faded onto the background and each activity is branded as its own. Branded identities allow a company to target specific audiences which can be very different from each other. (Olins, 1989) However, the lack of visibility of the parent company might pose some challenges for transparency with the separate brands.

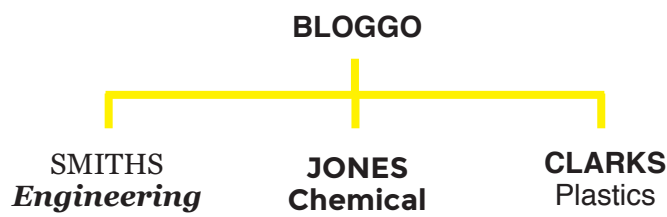
Although three categories for corporate visual identity structure can be identified, in practice they are often combinations of two or all three types. The Coca Cola Company is a good example of a hybrid structure that has also evolved over time. The company began its business by producing Coca Cola in 1886. It launched its first new product Fanta after 69 years of operation with the parent company name on the new bottle. The identity structure would have been considered as endorsed at the time. Today, there are over 20 different brands under The Coca Cola Company. Part of the identity still goes under the endorsed category through brands like Coca-Cola, Coca-Cola Zero, DietCoke and Coca-Cola Life which share the same visual cues as the parent company. On the other hand, brands such as Dasani, Minute Maid, Honest Tea and Fanta are clearly part of a branded identity structure with their own separate visual identities that are neither related to each other or to the corporation. (“The Coca-Cola Journey”, 2017)



Monolithic identity structure



Endorsed identity structure



Branded identity structure

Figure 4. Corporate identity structure. Adapted from *Corporate identity: Making business strategy visible through design* (p. 79). W. Olins, 1989, London: Thames and Hudson. Copyright 1989 Wally Olins. Adapted with permission.

Apart from arranging different activities within the organization, the design of visual identity is also influenced by each brand's identity structure. A brand identity can be divided into core identity and extended identity. Core identity is a timeless asset that encompasses the main values and drivers of the brand. Communication strategies might change but the core identity is more resistant to change across markets and products. The objective of the extended identity is to support the core identity with useful details and help make decisions on how to communicate about it. It is also where intended associations become visible through applications such as products and retail environments. A more multifaceted extended identity makes a brand more interesting like a person with a variety of traits. (Aaker, 1996) Visual design is central to the extended identity, yet it is guided by the values, beliefs and drivers of the core identity.

2.2.4 Managing associations

An organization is experienced through what it sells (products and services), where it makes or sells them (environments), how it communicates about its business and offerings (information) and how its employees act towards each other as well as customers (behavior). Decisions on visual identity need to be made on all four categories separately as well as together. However, in product-based companies the product is the most important component in the identity mix. (Olins, 1989, p. 29) When thinking of Apple for example, the first thing that comes to mind is the Mac computers, iPhones, their sleek designs, pale metallic color and the Apple logo. Other identity elements such as the minimalistic retail stores or promotional material finish second. Thus, the company's identity is to a large degree defined by its products which emphasizes the meaning of visual design in them.

Under corporate identity literature visual design receives a variety of possible applications. Visual design can be used to bring about the essence of the organization through the three themes of coherence, symbolism and positioning. Firstly, an organization wants to be perceived as coherent by exhibiting a clear company structure that is easily understandable across different divisions and brands. This aspect is mostly managed through the visual identity structure. Secondly, the organization wants to communicate its core values and attitudes symbolically for different stakeholders. Thirdly, it wants to differentiate itself from competitors and their offerings. (Olins, 1989, p. 148) The associations created by the visual identity can be managed through these three themes and many times a single element incorporates all of them.

Forming meaningful groupings of associations are essential to creating a brand that is both comprehensible and intriguing to consumers (Aaker, 1996). Arranging these associations is related to the concept of gestalt which has been recognized within brand and design management literature (Borja de Mozota, 2003, p. 83; Schmitt & Simonson, 1997, p. 106). Gestalt is a movement in psychology which believes that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Coordinating the separate parts as well as their combination is essential to communicating a unified brand message. (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997) Gestalt

can be applied to visual identity as a consumer will, perhaps unconsciously, collect and arrange separate visual elements to compose his or her perception about the company and its offerings.

Managing associations goes all the way to separate elements and their visual design. Companies can communicate brand values to their target groups through products. However, it is essential that the customer also connects the features to the brand in order to understand what the products represent. Brand descriptions can be turned into specific product features with the help of semantic transformation to strategically generate intended meanings. For instance, a bright yellow toaster could connote youthfulness and fun. Product design references can be divided into explicit and implicit depending on whether they are perceived immediately or more unconsciously. Explicit references are often very apparent and run throughout the product whereas implicit references are subtler and might not be detected by all customers. (Karjalainen and Snelders, 2010) An explicit reference in the described toaster could be the bright color while an implicit reference could be a less noticeable detail such as slightly rounded edges that imply friendliness (see Figure 5.).

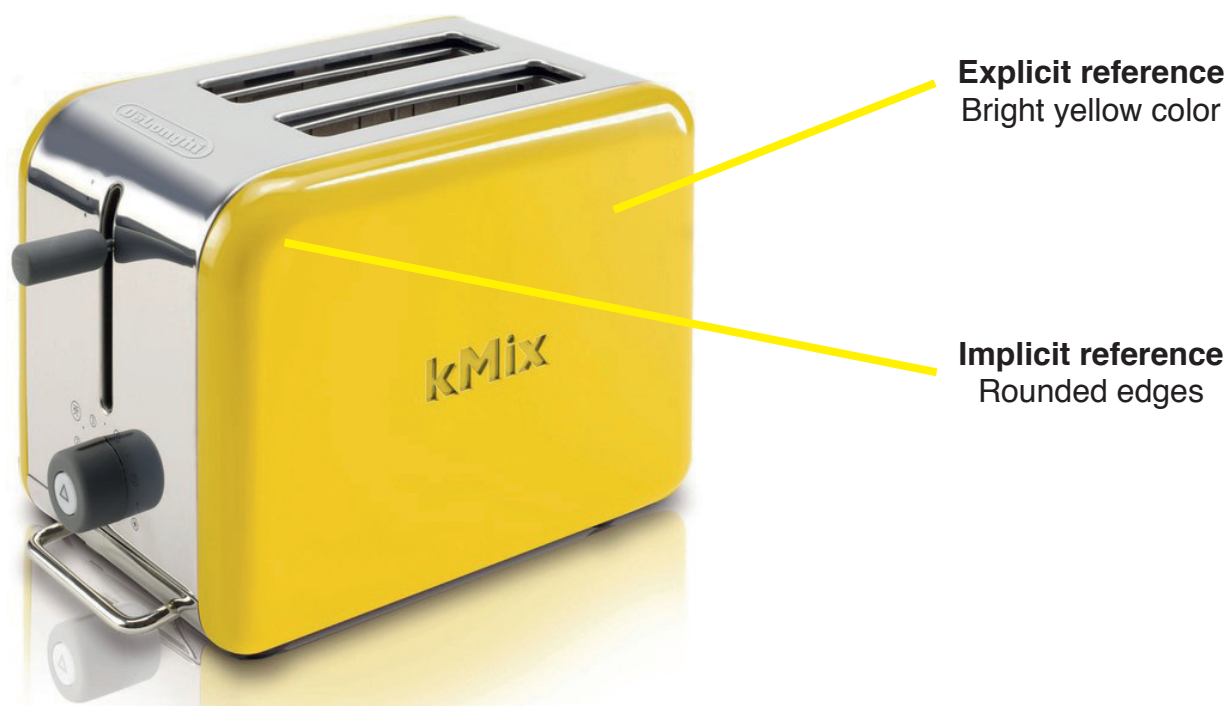


Figure 5. Explicit and implicit references on a bright yellow DeLonghi toaster.

2.2.5 Managing features

The consistency of product features can be managed both across the product portfolio and over time. Firstly, specifically chosen features can be used in single products or even over the complete product portfolio depending on the brand strategy. For instance, Apple has a high consistency strategy with all products sharing a similar visual language, whereas Samsung differentiates its individual products to a higher degree. Secondly, the characteristics of the market and brand can affect how much product features are altered over time. For instance, acting in a mature category and having long renewal cycles for products speak for more stability in features. Additionally, brands that have a strong heritage or an already easily recognizable identity also benefit from higher consistency. Overall, repeatedly using similar features makes them easier to recognize. However, too much repetition can also lead to boredom and make consumers less receptive to the intended messages proposed by product designs. (Karjalainen & Snelders, 2010)

“When designing visual elements, designers need to consider how to balance visual cues to create recognition but also allow for future redesign opportunities.”

To ensure that the brand stays fresh and keeps engaging consumers, even a high consistency strategy requires updates every now and then (Karjalainen & Snelders, 2010). Moreover, visual design strategy and its consistency requires revision when new products are launched. When designing visual elements, designers need to consider how to balance visual cues to create recognition but also allow for future redesign opportunities. Although features that are carried over from previous products can increase visual recognition they can also limit the visual flexibility in future design tasks. (Andersson & Warrel, 2015)

3

METHODOLOGY

The case study was conducted of the distillery Kyrö Distillery Company through visual background research as well as an interview. A single case study offered the opportunity to take a closer look at the use of visual identity in a company's branding efforts. Additionally, it supported the objective to discover the variety of applications visual design can have in one company. Visual research was utilized to gain an understanding of the company's background within the thesis topic as well as the associations created by design choices. Qualitative interviewing provided the opportunity to consult the person in charge of branding in the case company about the ideas and decisions behind the visual identity.

3.1 Case selection and criteria

A case study was conducted to support the literature review with the actual practice of a company. Instead of comparing several different companies' actions or trying to arrive at a comprehensive picture for the use of visual identity in Finland, I focused on one company. Through the case study I aimed to gain a deeper understanding of how one company has approached the creation of visual identity and what kind of considerations the management of visual design has posed. Kyrö Distillery Company was selected as the case company for two main reasons: active branding efforts and the broad use of visual material.

From the very beginning Kyrö Distillery Company has actively built its brand. Even before deciding upon the product portfolio the founding members settled on the company's main values. These brand values were to guide all company actions from operating principles to hiring employees and creating the visual identity. The characteristics of the case company's target market encouraged this type of approach on business. When Kyrö Distillery was established there were no Finnish premium gins or whiskeys. Gaining market share meant shaping the market and breaking traditional category boundaries. In addition to working on the product and company brand, the aim was to support the cocktail culture and premium distilled spirits in general. From early on it has also been clear that the company is aiming at international markets. Kyrö Distillery Company wants to become the best-known rye distillery by the year 2022. Branding is even more important when competing internationally. (Pankakoski & Koskinen, 2016)

Since the objective of this thesis was to study how visual design can be used to communicate a brand it was crucial for the chosen company to use a variety of visual material. Kyrö Distillery Company utilizes a lot of different channels for building its brand. The company's visual identity composes of product packaging, website, brand videos, employee apparel, company premises and restaurant, event and fair stand designs as well as publications in the traditional and social media.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

The objective for data collection was to understand how visual design has been used to create the Kyrö Distillery brand. The case study was divided into two main parts. First, the visual identity was studied by collecting and analyzing examples of the visual material the company has produced. Second, the visual research was supported by an interview with the marketing manager of the case company. After conducting the case study, the findings from both parts were combined to make a framework for how visual design has been utilized at Kyrö Distillery Company. Finally, the results were reflected against the literature review to derive more general insights about the use of visual design in a company.

3.2.1 Visual research

The first part of the case study consisted of visual research – the collection of visual reference material produced by the company and a visual analysis supported by news stories about Kyrö Distillery Company. The objective was to find out where visual design had been used in the case company, what its main messages were and how associations had been constructed. Since the visual research helped to gain an initial understanding of how visual design has been used to communicate the Kyrö Distillery Company brand, it guided the creation of interview questions in the second part of the case study. Additionally, the collected reference material was utilized to visualize case study findings.

The data for the visual research was collected from the internet, since most of the case company's communication channels are online. The restrictions on advertising strong alcohol beverages in Finland also limit the available channels. Visual reference pictures were gathered from the company website, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube as well as from news stories, blogs and other publications online. The images of the company's visual identity – product packaging, website, brand videos, pictures in the news and social media, company premises and restaurant

– were arranged according to channel and type into separate Google Drive folders. For instance, screenshots of Instagram photos were collected into one folder and photos of product designs created in collaboration with other companies into another. Additionally, links to news articles and blog posts about the brand of Kyrö Distillery Company were organized into one folder. These articles or blog posts were used to find out more about the considerations and objectives behind the visual material.

After arriving at a comprehensive set of reference images and articles about the visual identity of the case company the collected material was examined. To find out about the main messages proposed by the visual identity the material was reflected against the main brand values stated in the articles about the company. These values were honest quality (*rehellinen hifistely*), sense of humor (*huumorintaju*), polemical (*poleemisuus*), surrealism (*surrealismi*) and community (*yhteisöllisyys*) (Pankakoski & Koskinen, 2016).

Schmitt and Simonson's (1997, p. 85-86) framework for the elements of style in marketing aesthetics helped to specify and interpret the different components of the identity. The authors have divided the primary elements of aesthetics into four categories: sight, sound, touch and taste. Sight, the element relevant to the thesis topic, is divided into color, shape and typeface. For example, shape can be analyzed through the dimensions of size, angularity, proportion and symmetry. A feature like roundness (angularity) could evoke associations of harmony, softness and femininity. (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997, p. 86-91) In addition to the three categories of sight, the choice of materials played a fairly important role in the visual identity of Kyrö Distillery Company. Furthermore, the case company used a lot of photos symbolically referring to brand values and heritage. Hence, two more categories, materials and imagery, were added to the visual research findings.

3.2.2 Interview

The objective of the interview was to support the independently carried out visual analysis and to gain more knowledge about the practice of using visual design to communicate the brand in the case company. It provided the opportunity to investigate the decision-making and challenges behind creating and managing a visual identity.

The marketing director of Kyrö Distillery Company was selected as the interviewee because he was in charge of the visual identity. Interviewing as a method could provide information on choices and intentions behind the use of visual design.

The interview guide approach was chosen because it could offer a fairly systematic way of collecting data while simultaneously allowing for free discussion (Patton, 2002, p. 349). Interview guide approach is a form of qualitative interviewing where topics and issues are specified in advance but the wording of questions is left open (Patton, 2002, p. 343). The chosen approach was viewed as most effective for receiving more spontaneous responses as well as in-depth knowledge about the thesis topic. Additionally, photo elicitation was used to support the discussion about visual identity. Photo elicitation is the use of images to facilitate talk in an interview session (Edwards & Holland, 2013, p. 43-64). The objective was to visualize some of the content referred to in interview questions as well as to inspire more intuitive and specific responses.

The interview was divided into three parts, the first focusing on creating the visual identity, the second on managing it and the third discussing its implications on business (see Appendix 1). Photo elicitation was used in the second part with images from the prior visual research. The reference images were of bottle designs, restaurant and company premises, Instagram, YouTube, marketing photos and product collaborations. The interview questions were sent to the participant two days in advance for review and potential comments. The photo elicitation material was not sent to the interviewee in advance to ensure more intuitive responses. In the beginning of the interview, the use of the interview material was discussed to generate a mutual understanding of the intentions of the thesis. The interview was recorded by phone.

After the interview, the phone recording was transcribed so the answers could be interpreted. The phone recording was an hour and seven minutes long and the transcript about 3900 words. Content analysis, which is the act of reducing and making sense of qualitative data, was used to interpret the answers. The core meanings of the data were looked for by identifying any noticeable patterns. (Patton, 2002, p. 453) To encourage pattern recognition, the transcript was color-coded into four different categories: creating the visual identity, managing visual design and its challenges, meaning of visual identity as well as examples of specific identity elements.

4

CASE STUDY

The case study verified that visual design had been used very consciously in the branding of Kyrö Distillery Company. It also revealed the variety and complexity of the decisions related to visual identity. The case company had approached the creation of visual identity through its brand values and story. Managing a coherent and consistent visual identity required paying attention to the different visual cues and features as well as positioning and balancing them across the organization and its products. Visual design was managed in collaboration with many different parties including a branding agency, employees and distributors. Finally, the company had striven to strategically take advantage of visual design to create brand awareness, differentiate from competitors and justify a premium price.

4.1 Visual research findings

The visual analysis reveals that the case company has used visual design very consciously and that the created references are constructed upon the brand values and story. The visual identity and its main associations are interpreted through the categories of color and shape, typeface, imagery, and materials. While the case company clearly uses many standardized features, aesthetic flexibility has been retained by combining a few distinctive elements with more complex and multifaceted visual cues.

4.1.1 Color and shape

The two most frequently used colors in the visual identity of Kyrö Distillery Company are black and white. A large part of the photos, depicting for example the countryside of Isokyrö or the founders, is retouched to be black and white. The rule also applies to most pictures on social media and the website.

“Photos with color are mainly of food or drink with natural amounts of saturation and contrast. However, the amount of different colors in one photograph is often limited.”

Photos with color are mainly of food or drink with natural amounts of saturation and contrast. However, the amount of different colors in one photograph is often limited. For instance, the company’s products might be presented in a surrounding with one main color at a time such as a green Finnish forest (see Figure 6a). Similarly, photos depicting drink recipes have carefully picked accent colors that hint at the ingredients, taste and mood of the drink (see Figure 7). A similar approach is visible in brand videos where each of them has its own mood and reduced color scheme.

On the product package designs both the colors and the shape are very minimalistic. The bottle is the shape of a cylinder with slightly rounded edges and the label is white with mostly black writing. The name of the product is written in metallic with either silver or gold (see Figure 10). Silver is used for clear unaged and gold for matured spirits (Lindquist, 2014). The color of the liquor is accentuated because clear glass is used in the packaging. This is especially evident in the Long Kyrö long drink bottle where the cranberry-colored liquid makes the packaging pop (see Figure 8).

Overall, the color scheme and shapes used in visual identity of Kyrö Distillery Company are fairly simple. The chosen approach reflects the brand value honest quality as it is used to accentuate the product itself. The use of black and white images also evokes ideas of timelessness and heritage. In addition, some of the details such as the gold and silver lettering on the package design suggest luxury without being excessive.



Figure 6a. The Napue gin bottle depicted in a one-colored forest setting.



Figure 7. Carefully picked accent colors hint at the ingredients, taste and mood of the drink.



Figure 8. The natural color of the beverage is clearly visible through clear glass in the packaging.

4.1.2 Typeface

The Kyrö Distillery font is a custom typeface called Napue Sans which was created by the branding agency Werklig. It was derived from the old Napue battle memorial monument engravings (Lindquist, 2014) (see Figure 9). The typeface is bold and minimalistic with a hint of playfulness. For example, the dots of the 'Ä' or 'Ö' are in the shape of a triangle. The font is always all capitalized.

Napue Sans is used as an eye catcher on product packaging in very large size partly cut-off by the edge of the label. On packaging the text says either 'Gin gin', 'Rye rye' or 'Long Kyrö'. Additionally, Kyrö Distillery uses a serif font on longer descriptions or texts on its website as well as on the product names on packaging. Product names are in all caps. The brand values honest quality and sense of humour are present in the choice of typefaces. While the fonts reflect the heritage of the brand they are also playful, strong and simple.



Figure 9. The Napue Sans typeface was inspired by the engravings on the Napue battle memorial in Isokyrö.



Figure 10. The Napue Sans typeface is partly cut-off by the edge of the label. Additionally, either a silver (clear unaged spirits) or gold (matured spirits) label is used to hint at the product content.

4.1.3 Imagery

The brand values and heritage are present in the choice of photo subjects in the visual identity of Kyrö Distillery Company. Photos and brand videos often have a reference to Finnish nature or the small town of Isokyrö where the company was established. They might show the old building where the distillery is located, a river or a field of rye. On Instagram, most of the images depict the staff of Kyrö Distillery or the production spaces (see Figure 11). The photos show groups of happy employees or work in the distillery. On news articles and other publications on the media, the

founders of the case company are often depicted in humorous settings. For example, in one of the most known pictures the founders can be seen from the back running naked in a field of rye (see Figure 12). Another photo pictures two of the founders with barrels on their shoulders, one carrying a lamb and two with the Finnish flag in hand (see Figure 13). The chosen approach to imagery might be partly affected by the policies which do not allow for strong alcohol products to be advertised in Finland. However, it also reflects community, honest quality and surrealism, some of the main brand values of the case company.



Figure 11. On Instagram the imagery of Kyrö Distillery Company consists of mostly photos of employees and production spaces.



Figure 12. The founders are exhibited humorously running naked in a field of rye.



Figure 13. Despite the founders' serious faces, the setting and objects imply a humorous approach.

4.1.4 Materials

The materials used in the visual identity of the case company exhibit the values and heritage of the brand and thus follow a similar pattern as the other elements. The use of materials is most apparent on the company premises which consist of a distillery, visitor center and restaurant with a bar. In the restaurant, there are rustic tables and chairs and a chalk board with a hand-written drink menu sits on a barrel (see Figure 14 and 15). The staff wears simple black t-shirts with the company logo. In the distillery, the walls are covered with white tiles and the machinery is made of different metals suggesting more technical aspects of the business (see Figure 16). Modest wood and metal structures are used to stack the barrels of gin and whiskey. Apart from the company interiors, the founders often wear relaxed clothing like jeans and t-shirts or the Kyrö Distillery t-shirt and an apron in photos. The visual identity stays coherent by using similar materials throughout the premises and by keeping the color palette to a minimum despite changes in materials.



Figure 14. The drink menu is hand-written on a chalk board that sits on a barrel.

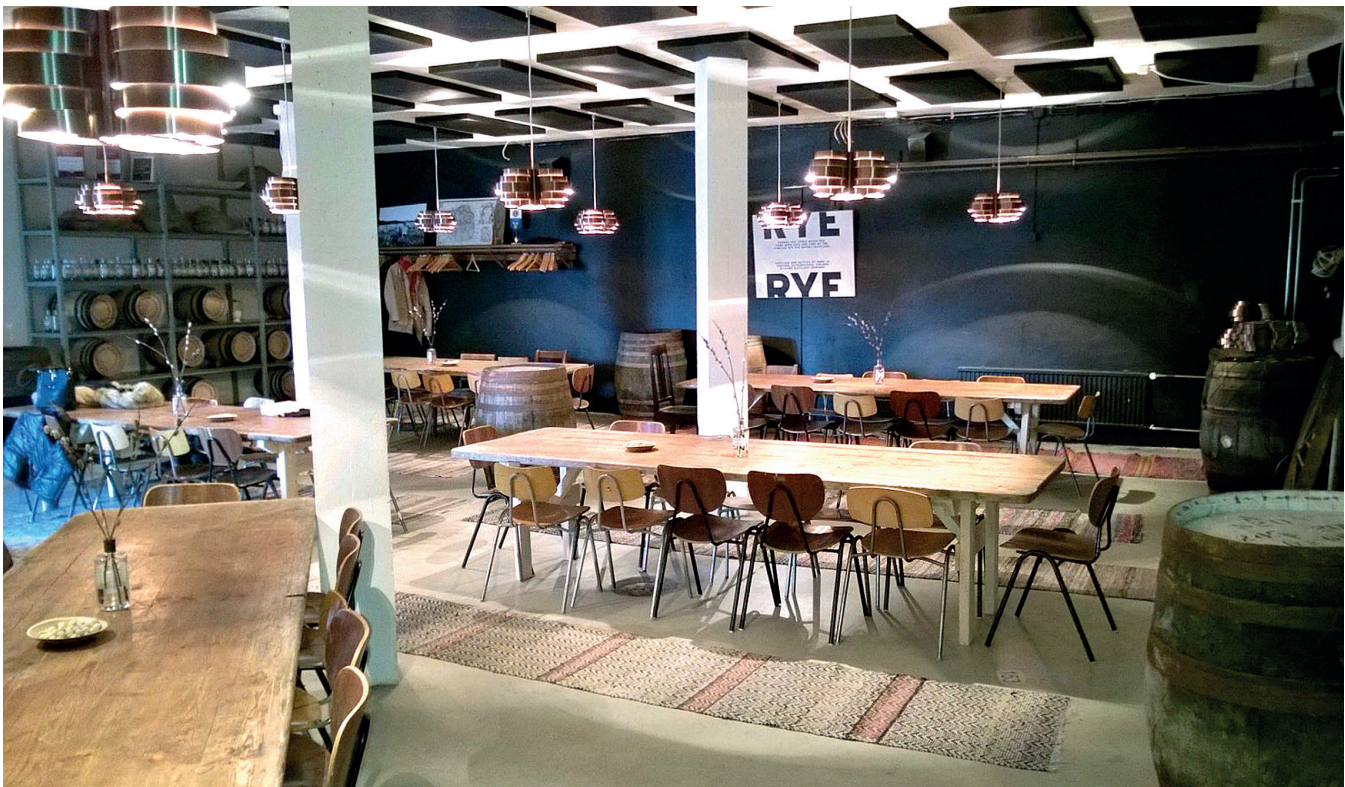


Figure 15. The restaurant is in a relaxed setting with rustic tables and chairs.



Figure 16. The production spaces show more technical aspects of the distillery business.

4.1.5 Balancing elements and features

Some elements or features are used fairly systematically across the visual identity of Kyrö Distillery Company. The number of used fonts is reduced to two with the custom font being the most frequently used. The font acts as a standardized variable that increases consistency and coherence and thus provides a valuable reference for brand recognition. Furthermore, the font is used in a similar manner, in large size and cut off by the label, in all product packaging. The bottle shape is also stable across all strong alcoholic beverages.

Moreover, distinctive patterns emerge from the use of colors and imagery. While black and white is the most frequent color combination in photos, color is used in mostly food and drink related content. All in all, coherence and consistency is managed through the careful use of distinctive features throughout the visual identity of the case company.

Aesthetic diversity is created through the content and style of imagery and the brand story based on local history. The used imagery varies both within and between the different channels like Instagram and website. While the website hosts large high-quality photos of products, founders, local nature of company premises and restaurant related images, Instagram is mostly filled with more relaxed photos of employees, products and visited places. The brand story and local history is interpreted freely into a variety of applications from typeface to photos and restaurant interior. Thus, the brand heritage seems to act as a source of aesthetic flexibility and visual design inspiration.

4.2 Interview findings

“I think that a visual identity should be built similarly to packing a parcel. It should be well thought out so that if someone shakes or drops the parcel the things inside it don’t break, and it really endures examination --- If one cannot answer why some decisions have been made, it has not been thought through enough.”

– Mikko Koskinen

The interview conducted with the marketing manager of Kyrö Distillery Company revealed the philosophy and way of working behind branding the company and creating and managing its visual identity. The main message was that planning a visual identity requires a lot of thinking and that all decisions regarding it should be defensible. Although agile responses are needed every now and then, having a clear set of brand values and visual identity guidelines based on them facilitates the everyday management of visual design.

4.2.1 Creating a visual identity

“I think that consumer and especially lifestyle brands cannot be created without doing the thinking behind it. It feels that many people think that since ‘we are in Finland, let’s put some reindeer skin on this’. Then the outcome resembles touristy bric-a-brac. However, the more one can tie the package designs and other [visual identity elements] to the company’s operations, the better and more durable they will be.”

– Mikko Koskinen

Early on, the founders of Kyrö Distillery Company had realized that to be able to make any decisions on visual identity, they needed to first express the vision of the company. Therefore, they defined the core values in 2013, only a year after deciding to found the company. The visual identity was to support these values. (M. Koskinen, personal communication, February 20, 2017) The interview revealed that creating a visual identity required

considerations on several levels from designing individual elements to choosing whether to standardize or localize the identity in foreign markets.

Building visual identity on brand values and heritage

Kyrö Distillery Company approached the creation of visual identity through the company’s core values and the brand heritage. The values were settled as surrealism, honest quality, transformative, sense of humor and community. According to the interviewee, the value honest quality guided the creation of the visual identity the most. It meant using quality materials and creating simple end results: “An offering is only ready when one cannot add or subtract anything without reducing its quality”. Additionally, the brand heritage played an integral role in building the aesthetics. The aim was to create an interesting yet honest visual identity that was intertwined with the location and local history, yet with a modern touch. The interviewee compared their approach to that of some American distilleries “whose logos look as if they were from the late 19th or early 20th century although the etiquette says ‘Established in 2005’”.

Close collaboration with the branding agency Werklig was integral to creating the Kyrö Distillery Company brand’s visual identity. In 2013 Werklig visited the chosen distillery location which ended up being the biggest source of inspiration for the aesthetics. After the visit Werklig created the first identity elements. For instance, the company’s custom font was taken from the Napue battle memorial which was close to the old cheese factory in Isokyrö, where the distillery was to be built in. “The font became an element that strongly determined the look of our company”, the interviewee explained. The name of the company, originally Rye Rye Oy, was also reinvented through the collaboration with Werklig.

The bottle design is a good example of how the visual identity was approached through brand

values. To start the design process, the founders reviewed 200 different stock bottles and ended up with a simple yet distinctive shape that supported the value honest quality. For the etiquette the company chose plain white paper with black writing and metallic folio for the name of the product. The material and printing choices supported the brand values by being interesting while only including the necessary. The value sense of humor was included in the design choices. The etiquette of the products says either “Rye rye” or “Gin gin” in large letters. The humorous touch is apparent when they are pronounced out loud in English. The first sounds like ‘rai rai’, a phrase which is associated with the Finnish drinking culture, and the latter like ‘chin-chin’, an expression used to propose a toast.

Despite the conscious use of brand values and heritage in branding Kyrö Distillery Company, Koskinen (Personal communication, February 20, 2017) acknowledged that intuition and the courage to try out ideas were important for starting businesses: “The earlier one makes good decisions, the better the direction the firm and visual identity will take from there. Compared to a brand built by a big organization ours has grown fairly organically. When we have been given an

opportunity we have taken it.” As an example the interviewee mentioned the first professionally taken photo of Kyrö Distillery Company created for a Finnish whiskey book. At that time the company didn’t have any distillery equipment yet. To depict this with honesty and a touch of humor, the photo shows the founders running naked in a field of rye.

Tackling the effects of legislation

The restrictions for advertising alcohol in Finland affected the style of the visual material directed at the Finnish market especially. Because the company Facebook page was targeted at Finnish consumers the permitted content was limited. The case company was only allowed to do corporate marketing – “show how things are done here” – and share news articles or press releases about their products or awards (see Figure 17). However, since country-specific limitations were not possible on Instagram, the visual material could be approached in a more relaxed manner.

The decision about applying the logo of the company to products was also affected by the Finnish alcohol legislation. If a logo visible on a gin or whiskey bottle was later used in a different context it could be regarded as advertising strong



Figure 17. The case company had tackled the effects of alcohol advertising legislation by relying on corporate marketing on its Facebook account.

alcoholic products – which is prohibited in Finland. The case company wanted to secure the use of its name (logo) and decided to leave it out on spirit etiquettes. According to the interviewee, most companies include both the house brand and the product brand in the package design. However, the case company believed that the strong and easily recognizable visual identity of Kyrö Distillery Company would provide enough brand recognition. After seeing a few of the company's products they would be able to identify other Kyrö Distillery products.

Standardizing visual identity internationally

Kyrö Distillery Company exported to 28 countries and had decided to keep a unified visual identity across markets. Koskinen (Personal communication, February 20, 2017) mentioned the international nature of many marketing channels and the channeling of resources as reasons for standardization. Firstly, since social media channels could be followed by people from all over the world country-specific accounts might be confusing to consumers. Hence, the case company perceived it to be both impractical and unnecessary to have separate profiles. Secondly, the case company wanted to focus on doing a few things well rather than have a fragmented approach described by the interviewee quite pertinently as “Okay, now we need to take the picture for Aruba”.

Despite the use of a standardized visual identity the case company recognized that the same content might not work for all customers across markets. For example, the company had considered using photos of clean waters (from Finland or Isokyrö) but suspected that they might be regarded as commonplace or corny in Finland. Using these type of images would require coming up with an approach that would work both within the domestic and foreign markets.

4.2.2 Managing visual design

“As long as the visual identity is not in your own hands, its management is very arduous. Even with good instructions, visual designs rarely go without review rounds. Although the permitted visual elements are defined, people have an incredible want to include all elements in the same design. For example, the first proposal for a stand at a Swedish fair was simply migraine-arousing. And it was created by a professional stand designer from the fair.”

– Mikko Koskinen

Kyrö Distillery Company strove to sustain a coherent and consistent brand identity without it being too monotonous or dull. The design objective was to answer to the needs of the business while aligning the creations with the brand values and story. The interview showed that the management of visual design was not always easy. The main challenges lay within collaborations or when the design of visuals was not in the company's control.

Using a variety of methods to convey brand associations

Koskinen (Personal communication, February 20, 2017) perceived that visual design was part of a broader concept of aesthetics in branding: “Visuals need to be related to both the brand philosophy and the rest of the senses.” For example, at a fair stand in Stockholm the case company had had a sauna where visitors were able to go in with their clothes on and smell different gin herbs mixed with the sauna water. Furthermore, the interviewee considered that conveying the complete brand spectrum and creating an emotional bond with customers required a combination of different elements and communication channels. A single element, such as the bottle package design, would convey only the simplest of messages whereas a few additional channels such as social media could already tell a lot more.

Creating connections between elements

Kyrö Distillery Company aimed to manage a cohesive visual identity where brand recognition would be increased through the deliberate use of similar or same visual elements across different applications. For example, in the first space open to visitors, the 2014 pop-up bar located in Kamppi, the case company strove to create a connection to its production spaces in Isokyrö. The bar counter was covered with similar white tiles as in the distillery. Overall, the visual style resembled rough minimalism as some of the materials used in the bar had an industrial feel to them. The materials were chosen to create a feeling of coherence, even if only unconsciously, if a customer was to visit both the bar and the company premises in Isokyrö.

Creating visual designs in product collaborations

At the time of the thesis Kyrö Distillery Company had created four different products together with other companies with the level of collaboration ranging widely in each. These included the Goodio chocolate bar with Napue gin inspired flavours (see Figure 18), the gin HelsinGin distilled in Isokyrö, the cranberry long drink Long Kyrö with Laitilan

Wirvoitusjuomatehdas as well as Moisturyeser, a rye-based hand cream for bartenders, in collaboration with Tummeli. The collaborations revealed several considerations about managing visual design in product collaborations.

When creating the visual design of a product collaboration one of the main challenges was balancing between the two brands and maintaining a distinctive visual identity. A good example was HelsinGin, where the gin had been distilled by the case company but the product content created by Paradise City Beverage Company. In the HelsinGin bottle designed by the collaborating company the “aesthetics had been taken from Napue [the Kyrö Distillery gin] yet it didn’t quite look like Napue” (M. Koskinen, personal communication, February 20, 2017). Koskinen thought that since HelsinGin was not under the Kyrö Distillery Company brand the design should have been visually further apart from their products (see Figure 19). Therefore, both the bottle shape and the etiquette of HelsinGin would undergo a redesign. The example showed the importance of having a mutual understanding about the objectives of a collaboration and considering the differing input levels of the two companies.

In product collaborations new form factors had affected design work. The Kyrö Distillery long drink where part of the product was created by

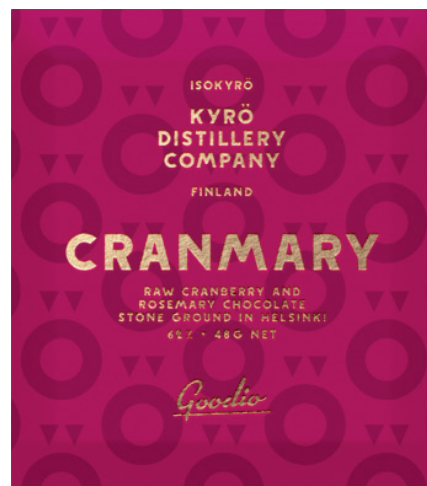


Figure 18. A product collaboration that combined two different brands, Goodio Chocolate and Kyrö Distillery Company.

Laitilan Wirvoitusjuomatehdas exemplified this well: “In product collaborations, one cannot fully determine the package shape as it is defined by the manufacturing company’s production equipment. If I could have decided, I would have put the Long Kyrö in a shorter bottle to create a visual joke.” To mitigate the effects of a new form factor and minimize review rounds the case company relied on their own branding agency. Koskinen thought that the designers at Werklig had the best understanding about what the brand was about.



Figure 19. The design of the HelsinGin bottle created in collaboration with Paradise Beverage City Company was seen as visually too close to the Kyrö Distillery brand and would thus undergo a redesign.

Maintaining a coherent and consistent visual identity

Until recently the team at Kyrö Distillery Company had been small enough to have a mutual understanding about the brand and its visual identity. However, the company had expanded and the visual designs were created in collaboration with other parties ranging from employees taking photos for social media to fair personnel designing stands. The main challenge was maintaining a unified look and message in the visual identity. Using a familiar agency was one of the most important methods for ensuring that the brand would be visualized satisfactorily. Therefore, central elements of the visual identity such as package designs were created in collaboration with the branding agency Werklig. (M. Koskinen, personal communication, February 20, 2017)

“Using a familiar agency was one of the most important methods for ensuring that the brand would be visualized satisfactorily.”

The case company used different types of instructions to ensure the intended result for visual designs and communicate a coherent brand message when not working with Werklig. Kyrö Distillery Company had created a brand book to reduce misunderstandings and thus speed up the creation of visual material. The brand book was a pdf slide set that defined the company values, brand corner stones and heritage, visual identity and the tone of voice in written messages. The book included guidance for the use of different visual elements, typography, colors and materials. Moreover, for example the aesthetics and themes of images were defined for each publishing channel and image type (drink, product, people). The case company had created a separate pdf presentation for distributors to explain how for example events should look, feel, taste and smell like. In addition to these two documents, the case company used curation for photographs to guarantee the quality, appeal and compliance to the alcohol advertising legislation. Employees could submit their own photos to the company WhatsApp or Slack to be reviewed and selected by the marketing manager and eventually posted on social media platforms such as Instagram.

4.2.3 Branding with visual design

“Before a person has tasted our products, the role of the visual identity is to stop the person, communicate what the products are about and raise the question about what they might taste like. After tasting the product, the visual identity should keep building an emotional bond with the brand.”

- Mikko Koskinen

At Kyrö Distillery Company visual identity was seen as a useful tool in branding by taking on a variety of roles. The main objectives for the visual identity were to be distinctive, memorable and to encourage customer loyalty. Koskinen (Personal communication, February 20, 2017) illustrated the meaning of branding by a comparison with Hernö, a Swedish gin distillery that was established approximately at the same time and had won the same prizes as Kyrö Distillery Company. Koskinen thought that Hernö had put less emphasis on its visual identity than the case company. According to the interviewee, Hernö's sales numbers in Systembolaget (a state-owned liquor store like Alko in Finland) were about 5 % of Kyrö Distillery Company's numbers. Although the example was presented without exact numbers it demonstrated the positive implications that branding and visual identity could have on business.

Differentiating and creating brand awareness

At Kyrö Distillery Company the visual design of the gin and whiskey bottle was used strategically in branding. The package design was one of the first and most visible elements of the Kyrö Distillery Company brand and the main objective behind its design was differentiation: “As most people weren't familiar with us the bottle design needed to be distinguished from others”. The etiquette on the bottle was designed to have the best possible stopping power while it sits on the shelf of a liquor store or a bar. According to Koskinen, humans detect imperfections more easily than things that seem all right, so they catch the attention of people. Therefore, the large font on the etiquette saying “Gin gin” was partly cut off (see Figure 20). (M. Koskinen, personal communication, February 20, 2017)



Figure 20. The edges of the label were partly cut off to raise attention when a consumer sees a Kyrö Distillery Company whiskey or gin bottle.

Communicating about the business or products

Visual design posed the possibility to strategically communicate about the business and products of Kyrö Distillery Company. For example, the picture where the founders of Kyrö Distillery Company run naked in a field of rye had been used to raise interest in the brand. In addition to using the picture in the media and on the company website, it had been used at fairs to generate to create a receptive state: “This picture can immediately create a smile on a person’s face. Very few pictures can accomplish that.” After starting production, depicting backstage processes gained more emphasis in the visual identity. The first brand video “Kyrö Distillery Work & Play” was designed to show a connection between production and enjoying the company’s products. The video starts off in the production spaces after which the image is smoothly transferred to nature where a bottle

of Napue is opened and served. Additionally, another video “Kyrö Distillery ‘A Day Out’ Koskue & Apple” was created to promote the gin Koskue and recommend a way of serving it. The video acted as a means for increasing demand by introducing new ways for consuming the product. (M. Koskinen, personal communication, February 20, 2017)

Creating alternative ways for experiencing the brand

Visual design let the case company implement its brand values and story in a more complex way than other marketing or branding efforts. At the Kyrö Distillery restaurant, visual design was used to create a setting that encourages behavior characteristic of the brand. For instance, food was served onto long tables in bigger bowls in the style of social dining. The dining experience let visitors live the brand value of community. Additionally, the heritage of the brand was made tangible by choices in the interior of the restaurant: some of the furniture had its origins in Isokyrö communities. To balance the visual design according to the value honest quality some surfaces had been left bare and simple. (M. Koskinen, personal communication, February 20, 2017) The visual design of the case company spaces allowed customers to have tangible experiences with the brand. In other words, customers could step into the brand and live its values instead of gaining second-hand experiences through photographs.

Justifying the premium price

The visual identity played a role in creating a luxury brand for Kyrö Distillery Company: “A premium product can be justified solely with a first class product as well as strong visual identity and branding work. That is what the customer pays for when he or she buys a more expensive product. The price of our gin compares to the price of single malt whiskey, so the product, its branding, the materials among other things need to be of superior quality.” Deciding on a suitable sales location was another consideration related to visual identity that was seen to protect the premium feel of the brand. For example, the Goodio chocolate bar created in collaboration with the case company would not be sold at the local grocery store cashier. (M. Koskinen, personal communication, February 20, 2017)

5

DISCUSSION

This thesis aimed to find out how a company can use visual design in branding. The research problem was studied by looking into how companies can approach the design of visual identity and what they need to consider when managing visual design. Additionally, the objective was to discover in what parts of branding visual design can play a role. The findings suggest that visual design is a tangible and versatile way of bringing forth brand values and communicating the brand story. Companies planning to build a visual identity need to consider both their business and brand structure as well as come up with a basis for the visual style. The management of visual design bears considerations on both strategic, operational and tactical levels. Moreover, the case study exemplifies that visual design can carry a variety of roles within branding.

5.1 Visual identity creation

The results of the thesis suggest that companies have various options for approaching the creation of their visual identity. First of all, companies need to consider how the visual identity relates to the private and public self of the company and how they want the visual identity to refer to the brand architecture. Traditional branding tools such as the brand value pyramid and the framework for the core and extended brand identity can be useful tools for creating the structure of the identity. In addition to the brand value representation, a story, or in the case of Kyrö Distillery company a location and its history, can act as a source of inspiration for designers.

The case study supports the idea that in product-based companies the product is an essential component in the identity mix (Olins, 1989). In the case company, the package design was the first place the visual identity was applied to. Additionally, the product was used as one of the first means for reaching consumers and creating awareness about the company. These findings imply that although the visual identity should be managed as a combination of elements, the meaning of the core product or service's visual design should not be undermined.

Depending on the industry, when beginning to create an identity companies might need to consider the effects of legislation on visual identity. In the case company, all three different ways for structuring visual identity, monolithic, endorsed and branded, were not available because of alcohol legislation. Kyrö Distillery had made the strategic choice of leaving the house brand from their gins and whiskeys to protect the use of the name in other contexts. In these type of situations, other elements in the visual identity become more important as branding cannot be based purely on the company name. Additionally, strict policies put more emphasis on the creativity and talent of designers to conceive alternative approaches for visual identity.

The decision of Kyrö Distillery Company to standardize its visual identity across borders spoke against the traditional view that a localization strategy works best (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997, p. 256). However, Melewar and Saunders (1999) found that in practice multinational enterprises tend to standardize their corporate visual identity and that the chosen approach didn't seem to affect the business significantly. The authors suggest that in established companies the originally intended meanings of the visual identity play a less significant role because associations have accumulated in consumers' minds over time. (Melewar & Saunders, 1999) In the thesis case study Koskinen (Personal communication, February 20, 2017) raised the idea that the international nature of today's marketing channels such as social media has altered the rules of standardization and localization. As a result, creating a coherent visual identity across markets could be a viable option for younger companies as well. Additionally, the case company agreed that standardization is both more cost-efficient and less arduous (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997, p. 256).

5.2 Management of visual design

Visual design can stretch to all elements of an organization and its brands and it needs to be managed on both the level of each element and their combination. The literature review as well as case study suggest that brand coherence and recognition can be managed by using similar visual cues between different identity elements. Standardizing a few distinctive elements can act as a baseline for coherence and recognition. However, companies should avoid a too restricted approach to visual design to allow for future redesign opportunities and development of the brand (Andersson & Warrell).

When it comes to managing a set of associations, the thesis findings support the idea of gestalt. Koskinen (Personal communication, February 20, 2017) believed that a combination of different channels for communicating the visual identity of Kyrö Distillery Company would add up to a comprehensible big picture in consumers' minds. In addition, Koskinen proposed that the ultimate brand experience would acknowledge all senses as in synesthesia (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997, p.105). These findings suggest that companies should consider how different channels relate to each other and how visual design fits into the broader concept of aesthetics including both sight, smell, taste and touch.

”The case study revealed that one of the core aspects of managing visual design is having a trusted design partner. ”

The case study revealed that one of the core aspects of managing visual design is having a trusted design partner. At its best, the benefits the design firm can bring go beyond the individual identity elements (Borja de Mozota, 2003, p. 206). This idea was reinforced by the findings of the case study. The branding agency Werklig not only turned the abstract brand value representation into an

intriguing concept and visual identity elements but also had an integral role in keeping the visual identity coherent and interesting. The partner agency was most familiar with the brand and could therefore create successful designs with less review rounds and save time (M. Koskinen, personal communication, February 20, 2017).

Despite using a trusted partner for visual design, companies will need to collaborate with other stakeholders such as unfamiliar designers, employees and distributors from time to time. One approach to managing visual designs created by collaborating parties is providing an elaborate design manual where every application of the identity program is codified (Olins, 1989, p.192). The case company had followed this approach to reduce the amount of misunderstandings which seemed to occur regularly with external partners especially. The findings suggest that companies might benefit from centralizing design activities, especially when it comes to core visual identity elements. Additionally, giving the selected design firm or partner a thorough introduction into the background of the company and its values can be very valuable.

5.3 A variety of roles in branding

Visual design can be used strategically to differentiate from competitors, create brand awareness and a complex yet comprehensible set of brand associations as well as to justify a premium price. In the case company aesthetics was also defined as one of the corner stones of the brand which supports the idea of aesthetics as its own segmentation criterion for products (Borja de Mozota, 2003).

Since the case company acted in a highly regulated market which affected its use of branding methods, the findings suggest that visual design can offer an alternative approach to for example advertising. Hypothetically, if a consumer recognizes the Napue Sans font and a familiar bottle shape on a whiskey bottle and connects it to the similar visual cues on the Napue bottle he or she is able to make a connection between the products, and possibly to the parent brand as well. If the categorization leads to a fond memory of for example a Napue and tonic with a friend, the identification can be attached to the brand identity of Kyrö Distillery Company. The presented situation supports Andersson and Warrell's (2015) conceptualization for meaning-making in the identification process of visual product design. Based on this proposition, visual design can be a powerful way of branding.

“The case study indicates that visual design can be utilized when building a luxury brand.”

Moreover, the case study indicates that visual design can play a role in building a luxury brand. Similarly to Borja de Mozota (2003, p. 211), visual design was identified as a means to justify premium price in the case study. Kapferer (2006, p. 72) suggests that companies without a long history can approach building a luxury brand through the communication of a brand story and creation of a distinctive shopping experience. Visual design

can act as a tangible representation of the brand story in a variety of applications from products to interiors, and thus pose an alternative approach for young companies aiming to enter niche markets.

The thesis raised the idea that visual design could also have potential for educational application. Instead of regarding visual identity as the end result of the design process, it could be approached as an educational tool in branding. As a company considers how to structure brand and product names in the visual identity or balance features across the product line and time, it is simultaneously forced to tend to a variety of core issues within branding. This poses interesting pedagogical opportunities for the use of visual design concepts in organizations or educational institutions.

5.4 Limitations and suggestions for further research

Since the case study was conducted of a fairly young company there are limitations to the findings. Since qualitative measurement was out of the scope of this thesis, the findings do not address the effectiveness of the presented approaches to building and managing visual design. In the future the topic could be studied retrospectively through a multiple case study by reviewing the visual design choices of the past and their effects on the companies' business.

As the perspective of designers was not acknowledged in the case study it would be interesting to study how designers approach the ideation of visual identity elements and what kind of challenges they encounter. Furthermore, the case study shed light on a few issues relating to creating visual designs for product collaborations. Visual design could be studied purely from the perspective of product collaborations and the challenges and opportunities they pose. The findings of this thesis suggest that visual design could have a lot of potential when creating product line extensions.

Additionally, this thesis raised the question about how companies should balance visual identity in foreign compared to domestic markets. Standardization and localization of visual design could be studied in the context of contemporary marketing channels such as social media.

In this case study, the company had built its brand identity local history of the chosen distillery surroundings. Further studies could investigate the role of visual design when building a luxury brand without long history and heritage.

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Figure 2. The brand value pyramid. Adapted from *Brand Asset Management: Driving profitable growth through your brands*. (p. 55), S. M. Davis, 2000, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc. Copyright 2000 by the Jossey-Bass Inc. Adapted with permission.

Figure 3. Levels of visual identity management. Adapted from *Managing corporate visual identity: Use and effects of organizational measures to support a consistent self-presentation*. A. L. M. van den Bosch, M. D. T. de Jong, W. J. L. Elving, 2004, Public Relations Review, 30(2), p. 225. Copyright 2004 by the Elsevier Inc. Adapted with permission.

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APPENDIX 1. INTERVIEW OUTLINE IN ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

Tausta

1. Voisitko lyhyesti kertoa, mikä sinun roolisi KDC:ssä ja visuaalisen identiteetin parissa on?

Visuaalisen identiteetin luominen

2. Miten lähditte liikkeelle visuaalisen identiteetin luomisessa KDC:lle?

3. Mikä on mielestäsi keskeistä visuaalisen identiteetin luomisessa? (Mikä on mielestäsi keskeistä Kyrön visuaaliselle identiteetille?)

Visuaalisen identiteetin hallinta

4. Ketkä osallistuvat visuaalisen identiteetin kehittämiseen, luomiseen ja ylläpitämiseen arjessa?

5. Miten visuaalista identiteettiä ylläpidetään ja hallitaan? (Kontrolloidaanko KDC:ssä jollakin tavalla visuaalisten materiaalien luomista? Jos kyllä, miten?)

6. Miten lähdette liikkeelle toisen yrityksen kanssa yhteistyössä tehtyjen tuotteiden tai projektien visuaalisen ilmeen kanssa? (esim. Cranmary chocolate/ Goodio, HelsinGin/Paradise City Beverage Company ja Long Kyrö/Laitilan Wirvoitusjuomatehdas)

7. Tuleeko sinulle mieleen joitakin haasteita liittyen visuaalisen identiteetin ylläpitämiseen?

8. Minkälaisena näet KDC:n visuaalisen identiteetin tulevaisuudessa? (Uudet tuotelanseeraukset yms.?)

Visuaalinen identiteetti ja liiketoiminta

9. Mitä visuaalinen identiteetti merkitsee KDC:lle?

10. Minkälaisia vaikutuksia KDC:n visuaalisella identiteetillä on tai on ollut liiketoiminnalle? (Mitkä ovat mielestäsi KDC:n visuaalisen ilmeen suurimmat hyödyt?)

11. Onko eteen tullut yllätyksiä tai odottamattomia haasteita liittyen visuaaliseen identiteettiin?

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